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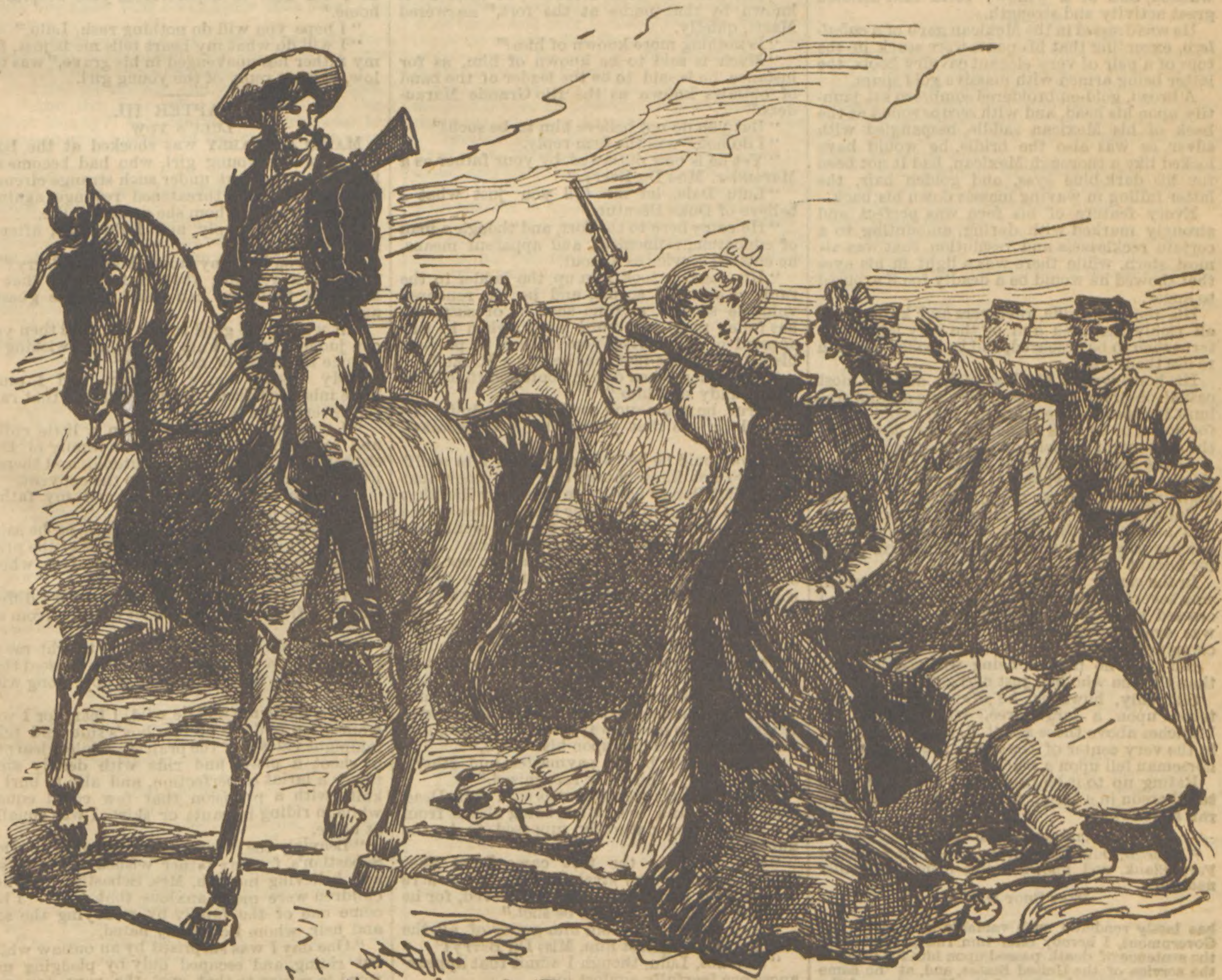
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THE MYSTERIOUS MARAUDER; or, The Boy Bugler's Long Trail

A Companion Story to "Benito, the Boy Bugler," and "Keno Kit, the Boy Bugler's Pard."

BY COL. PRENTISS INGRAHAM,

AUTHOR OF "THE MIDSHIPMAN MUTINEER," "THE FLOATING FEATHER," "DEAD SHOT DANDY," ETC., ETC.



"AY, WOULD I KILL HIM, FOR THAT MAN IS CAPTAIN DEAD SHOT, THE MARAUDER, AND HE KILLED MY FATHER!"

The Mysterious Marauder:

OR, The Boy Bugler's Long Trail.

A Companion Story to "Benito, the Boy Bugler," and "Keno Kit, the Boy Bugler's Pard."

BY COL. PRENTISS INGRAHAM,
AUTHOR OF "DEAD SHOT DANDY," "KENO KIT,"
"BILLY BLUE EYES," ETC.

CHAPTER I. OUTLAWED.

A HORSEMAN was riding slowly over a Texas prairie, one lovely afternoon, a score or more years ago, and his horse was heading toward a clump of timber visible a mile beyond him, and which formed one of a line of oasis like groves that spread across the flower-bespangled plain as far as the eye could reach.

Toward this particular point a number of trails led, as though it were a common center for those whose duties caused them to cross the prairies.

But now only the horseman was visible upon the vast expanse of plain, and he rode along in a listless manner, as though utterly indifferent to the fact that he was in the land of the merciless Indian, and where they lay in wait for richly-freighted trains and travelers, the equally as merciless Marauders of the Rio Grande.

The man and his horse were both such as to attract attention and admiration, whether met upon the wilds, or in the marts of civilization.

The rider was tall, broad-shouldered, small-waisted, and of a willowy form that denoted great activity and strength.

He was dressed in the Mexican garb of a *caballero*, excepting that his pants were stuck in the tops of a pair of very elegant cavalry boots, the latter being armed with massive gold spurs.

A broad, gold-embroidered sombrero sat jauntily upon his head, and with *serape* rolled at the back of his Mexican saddle, bespangled with silver, as was also the bridle, he would have looked like a thorough Mexican, had it not been for his dark-blue eyes, and golden hair, the latter falling in waving masses down his back.

Every feature of his face was perfect and strongly marked with daring, amounting to a certain recklessness and resolution that was almost stern, while there was a light in his eyes that showed he would be a deadly foe if aroused to anger.

His repeating rifle, revolvers and knife, were all richly mounted and of the very latest patterns then to be procured, and he looked the man to use them well.

His horse was as black as night, and the most casual observer could see that the animal was built for speed and endurance, and could run a foe down, or could fly from too great danger, as the case might be, without distress to himself.

As the rider approached the timber he moved slowly, and with evident caution, as though not knowing what danger might lurk in its depths.

But at last, as though satisfied that no enemy was ambushed there, he rode forward at a quicker pace, his rifle held across his arm ready for instant use.

In the center of the clump of timber, which was several acres in size, three trails met and crossed each other, and upon each side there was every indication that it was a common camping-ground.

But now no human being was visible other than the one who had just arrived.

Suddenly, however, he drew rein, for, fastened upon a large tree, which reared its branches above those about it, and which stood in the very center of the trails, the eyes of the horseman fell upon a placard.

Riding up to it he read aloud what was written thereon in a large, distinct hand, and which ran as follows:

"PROCLAMATION AND REWARD!"

"Whereas, Duke Decatur, late chief of scouts at Fort Blank, and known better under his border name of

DEAD SHOT DANDY,

has lately rendered such valuable services to his Government, I hereby offer him full pardon from the sentence of death passed upon him for being in the service of the United States, and, at the same time, secretly the Leader of the Marauders of the Rio Grande.

"The term of thirty days will be given to the said

Dead Shot Dandy in which to come in and surrender himself at Fort Blank, when instantly he shall receive pardon and be appointed a scout at the fort.

"If he refuses this offer, then, after the thirty days have passed,

FIVE THOUSAND DOLLARS REWARD

will be paid for his body, dead or alive.

"DUNCAN DU BARRY,

Colonel U. S. Army and

Commandant Fort Blank."

The horseman read the placard twice through, his face flushing and paling by turns, and his eyes flashing.

Then he said hoarsely:

"I am not one to accept pardon, and woe be unto the man who seeks that reward.

"Come, Night Hawk, old horse, we are outlaws and fugitives upon the face of God's green earth, for that paper makes us so."

CHAPTER II.

AN OUTLAW'S FAIR DEFENDER.

"MISS DU BARRY, who is this man whom they call Dead Shot Dandy?"

The question was addressed to Marie Du Barry, the beautiful daughter of the colonel commanding Fort Blank, and whose name was signed to the proclamation which the horseman had read nailed upon a tree in the timber motte.

The questioner was a maiden also, a few years the junior of Marie Du Barry, yet not less lovely in face and form, though she looked pale and wan now, and reclined upon a lounge, for she was just recovering from a severe wound which had well-nigh cost her her life.

The two were together in the cosy cabin quarters of the colonel and his daughter at Fort Blank, and where the wounded maiden had been for weeks, tenderly nursed by Marie Du Barry.

"His name is Duke Decatur; at least he is known by that name at the fort," answered Marie, quietly.

"Is nothing more known of him?"

"Much is said to be known of him, as for instance, he is said to be the leader of the band of outlaws known as the Rio Grande Marauders."

"But you do not believe him to be such?"

"I do not," was the firm reply.

"Yet he is now outlawed by your father as a Marauder, Miss Du Barry."

"Lulu Dale, let me tell you just what I believe of Duke Decatur."

"He came here to the fort, and though a man of education, refinement, and apparent means, he entered service as a scout."

"His courage took him up the ladder to the rank of chief of scouts, and he has rendered valuable service, and no shadow of suspicion has fallen upon him until lately, when he was accused of murdering your father, to prevent his betraying the fact that he was a Marauder."

"My father, when dying, confessed that Dead Shot Dandy shot him."

"True, he made such confession, I admit; but Lulu, I believe that your father was mistaken in the man."

"How could he be, when he knew him well?"

"I do not know, Lulu; but I do know that Dead Shot Dandy has twice saved my life, that I warned him of the danger that he would face if he came to the fort, and that he would not fly, as though guilty; but came on here."

"He was, under the circumstances, not shot as your father's murderer, but reduced to the ranks, and Monte, his worst foe, made chief in his stead."

"He could have left the fort then, yet he did not, and he did most gallant service in leading the command in two successful raids against the Indians."

"Then appearances came up against him again, for he is said to have robbed Paymaster Leighton when on his way to San Antonio, and also again robbed him upon his return."

"He was seen by the paymaster and others, Miss Du Barry, and fully recognized."

"A person was seen who was said to be Dead Shot Dandy, and the latter being absent from the fort, he was naturally supposed to be the guilty one."

"Yet, back to the fort came Dead Shot Dandy, telling a very straight story as to where he had been, and which was disbelieved, for he was tried and sentenced to be shot."

"And you do not deem him guilty of all the charges made against him, Miss Du Barry?"

"I do not, Lulu, though I admit that appearances are fearfully against him."

"Believing him innocent, and anxious to return the service he had twice rendered me in

saving my life, I threw aside my garb of womanhood, dressed in man's attire, and set him free."

"And that very night two others in this fort, Keno Kit, a scout, and Benito the Boy Bugler, also his friends, and believing in his innocence, made an attempt to rescue him, and which would have been successful had I not already released him."

"That was the night that he found me?"

"Yes, that was the night when, though flying for his life, he saw you pursued by four Indians and boldly came to your aid, when your horse was shot and fell upon you."

"Yes, he did do that, and killed the four Indians who were chasing me."

"True; and finding that you had been wounded by a poisoned arrow, he brought you to within a few paces of the sentinel at the stockade gate, and called to him to take care of you."

"Had he not done so you would have died."

"So I believe; but he knew not who I was, and that act does not wipe out the memory that he murdered my poor father."

"He is said to have done so you mean, Lulu."

"And what did he do then, but when Captain Cecil Lorne and a squadron went in chase of him, and their camp was to have been attacked by a large body of warriors, he warned the troopers of their danger and told them how to surprise the red-skins."

"This was what caused my father to offer him pardon."

"Which he has not accepted, Miss Du Barry?"

"No, not thus far; but there are yet several days before the thirty are up."

"You are a bold defender of the outlaw, Miss Du Barry; but I must tell you just how I feel in regard to him, and what I shall do as soon as I am able to depart from your hospitable home."

"I hope you will do nothing rash, Lulu."

"I will do what my heart tells me is just, for my father lies unavenged in his grave," was the low, earnest reply of the young girl.

CHAPTER III.

LULU'S VOW

MARIE DU BARRY was shocked at the bold words of the young girl, who had become an inmate of the fort under such strange circumstances, and who threatened revenge against the very man to whom she owed her life.

She made no reply, and Lulu Dale, after a short silence, said:

"Will you hear my story, Miss Du Barry?"

"Certainly, Lulu; though I believe that I know all that you can tell," was the guest's answer.

"It will do me good to tell you, and then you can judge whether I am not right in wishing to avenge the death of my father."

"My mother was a Mexican, and I must have inherited from her the nature of that race for revenging a wrong."

"I was left motherless when a little child, and my father placed me in the family of Don Sebastian Brent, near San Antonio, and there I lived until old enough to go to the convent."

"I knew no mother's love, and my father only visited me twice each year."

"I believed him to be a ranchero as he said; but now I know that he was a scout of the prairies, and was engaged here at this fort, where he was known as Bronze Bill."

"When he visited me he seemed a very different man from what he was as a scout, from all reports."

"He supplied me with money, taught me to ride, and gave me a pony, and also insisted that I should have the education of a boy, along with that of a girl."

"This made me a little wild, I fear, for I was wont often to dress up in a boy's suit and take midnight rides over the prairies, while I learned to shoot a pistol and rifle with deadly aim, throw a lariat to perfection, and also to hurl a knife with a precision that few could equal, while in riding in pants or skirts I was equally at home."

"Leaving the convent, I returned to Don Sebastian's, for my father wished me to do so; and believing me rich, Mrs. Sebastian and her children were most anxious that I should become one of the family by marrying the son and heir, whom I cordially hated."

"One day I was surprised by an outlaw while out riding, and escaped only by pledging my word to return to that spot the next day and pay a ransom fee, and give up my jewelry."

"I returned, but I captured the robber, who

was a murderer and a fugitive from justice, with a reward offered for him.

"I was having considerable trouble in getting him to San Antonio, when a horseman approached.

"It was Dead Shot Dandy.

"He aided me with my prisoner, and after delivering him over to the authorities, who at once hanged him to a tree in the Plaza, Dead Shot Dandy escorted me home.

"Then I found out, from his words, that he was a scout at this fort, had known my father, whom I was amazed then to learn was a scout and hunter, and not a ranchero.

"He gave to me the money which my father had left for me and took his departure.

"The next day Paymaster Leighton arrived and told his story, of how my father had been murdered, by one Dead Shot Dandy, who had become a Marauder.

"He told me how this Dead Shot had robbed him, on his way to San Antonio, and was surprised to learn that I had met the outlaw scout and received from him the very money which the paymaster had held for me, and then boldly visited my home and given it to me.

"It may be, Miss Du Barry, that I would have led a different life, had I not overheard Don Sebastian and his wife discussing me.

"The woman finding that I only had been left several thousands, and that my father was not what he had represented himself, urged that the Don should take even that little from me, and then set me adrift in the world.

"I was imbibed greatly by hearing this, and I at once made my plans to leave.

"My desire to solve the mystery concerning my father's death, and to punish his murderer, made me turn my eyes toward this fort.

"But I could act better as a boy than as a girl, and I at once assumed the dress of one, cutting off my hair, and determined not to let any one know that I was other than what I appeared.

"A peon acted as my guide to near this fort, and then I dismissed him, to be soon after headed off by those Indians.

"I fled for my life, and you know the result."

"And this man who saved you was Dead Shot Dandy?" said Marie Du Barry, who had listened with interest to the story of the young girl.

"Yes."

"And you are determined to seek revenge upon him?"

"You say that you do not believe that Dead Shot Dandy is the one who brought me my money, and who killed my father?"

"Nor do I."

"You believe that it is some one else who resembles him?"

"I hardly know what to believe, other than that I feel that he is not the guilty one."

"One question, Miss Du Barry?"

"Well, Lulu?"

"You will pardon my asking it?"

Marie's face flushed and she remained silent, while Lulu asked bluntly:

"Do you love this Dead Shot Dandy?"

"You have no right to ask such a question, Miss Dale," indignantly said Marie Du Barry.

"Pardon me, for I meant not to offend you, Miss Du Barry.

"But I have my answer, and, for yoursake, I will not act rashly; but I now vow to you, with my hand raised to heaven, that I will hunt down the man who killed my father, and he, too, shall die.

"If it be Dead Shot Dandy, he dies; if it be another, then will I clear this mystery about him, as to whether he is the guilty one or not, and you will thank me for it.

"Remember, I will not kill until I know, but I vow solemnly to avenge my father."

One glance into the pale, beautiful face, with the flashing eyes and resolute mouth, and Marie Du Barry felt that Lulu Dale meant what she said, and would keep her vow.

CHAPTER IV.

A BOY'S OATH.

In a comfortable cabin of the post, some days after the conversation between Marie Du Barry and Lulu, the scout's daughter, two persons were seated, the one cleaning up a rifle and the other engaged in playing a cornet, from which he brought rare melody, although he was but a boy in years.

The musician was, as I have said, a boy, for he was not over fifteen, yet tall and well formed for his age, and with a face that was full of expression, character and daring far beyond his years.

He was dressed in a handsome uniform, yet

wore no insignia of rank, and his pants were stuck in military boots armed with silver spurs, while a black slouch hat, ornamented with a sable plume, was worn jauntily upon one side of his head.

The cornet he had was a very handsome instrument of pure silver, and he played it with the ease and skill of a master, sending its notes pealing through the camps and fort, and floating far off upon the balmy night air.

His companion was a weather-beaten man of forty-five, with a face that was honest in the extreme and daring to recklessness.

He was dressed in buckskin, wore a sombrero, and looked just what he was—a prairie scout.

The cabin was large and roomy, had a cot in one end, and a bear-skin couch in the other, with a table, several rustic chairs, and the walls adorned with trophies of the chase, from Indian scalps to buffalo-heads.

The fire-place was large, and upon the hearth were the cooking utensils of the two house-keepers, for the scout and the boy lived together.

The one was Benito Dewhurst, the Boy Bugler, and the other was Keno Kit, the scout.

The former had been found one night by Dead Shot Dandy, playing his bugle in a clump of timber, while about him lay the wreck of a train and the dead bodies of his family, who had been murdered and robbed by the Marauders of the Rio Grande.

The boy's temporary absence from camp searching for his pony had saved his life, and returning he had come upon the scene of desolation and death that had greeted the eyes of Dead Shot Dandy when he found him.

The poor boy had told the scout that his sister, who had been with the train, was not among the dead, and it was feared that she had been carried off a captive by the Marauders.

But those who had seen the Marauders upon their retreat had reported that no captives were with them, and poor Louise Dewhurst was then supposed to have fled from the fatal scene and perished upon the prairies, for no trace of her could be found afterward.

Bringing the boy to the fort the scout had adopted him as his *protege*, while he was at once made the bugler of the post, young as he was.

Together Dead Shot Dandy and Benito had lived in the little cabin until the downfall of the scout, and after his escape, through the aid of Marie Du Barry, Keno Kit had come to live with the boy in his home, and there the two are found together when presented to the reader.

"Bah! I feel out of sorts to-night, Keno Kit, and cannot half play," said Benito, impatiently, throwing aside his cornet.

"Yer is playin' bootiful, Boy Pard, an' yer moosic are sweeter than thet yallar bird kin make, what Miss Marie, the colonel's darter hes got in a cage," said Keno Kit, admiringly.

"No, Kit, I am feeling blue, and I'll tell you why," answered the youth.

"You know that the time is up to-day?"

"Waal, pard, why are it?"

"What time?"

"The thirty days."

"Oh, yas, I had fergotted."

"Yes, the thirty days given to Dead Shot Dandy are up to-day, and he has not come in."

"I hain't seen him."

"And I fear we will not see him."

"So I are thinkin'."

"I do wish that he had taken advantage of the offer of the colonel."

"Yas, it would hev been better."

"And now, Keno Kit, he is under a ban, with a reward offered for his body."

"Yas, an' it are a peart leetle sum."

"True, Kit, and the reward reads dead or alive, so that there will be plenty of men strike his trail just to win that money."

"I guesses so, Beeneeto."

"They will ambush every trail for him, and each clump of timber will have a foe in it lying in wait for him."

"Thet are about ther size o' it, pard."

"Then I fear there is no hope for him, Keno Kit."

"It do look so."

"What do you think of his not having accepted the offer of the colonel, Kit?"

"I dunno, fer it did look squar' in ther colonel ter offer it."

"Yes, and I think that Dead Shot should have come in and accepted it."

"I were in hopes thet he would, pard; but he knows his biz best, I guesses."

"Ah me! I do wish that I could see him just to have a little talk with him."

"I wishes so, too, leetle pard."

A silence of some minutes fell upon the two,

and then Benito suddenly sprung to his feet and cried, excitedly:

"I have it!"

"Yer seems ter hev it bad, pard, an' it struck yer suddint like; where does it hurt yer?"

"Nonsense, I'm not sick, Benito, only I have an idea."

"Oh! I thought yer had 'em, as ther boys says when they hes been h'istin' tanglefoot too frequent."

"I do not drink, as you know, Keno Kit."

"Thet were why I wondered how yer hed got 'em."

"Well, I'll tell you what I intend to do."

"Go slow, pard."

"I intend to go slow, for I have a long trail before me; but I intend to go on the hunt for Dead Shot Dandy—"

"What?"

"I mean it, and I shall solve this mystery as to whether he is guilty of the charges made against him, or has a double."

"Leetle pard, does yer believe me a fool?"

"No, indeed."

"Then take my advice and stay right here."

"I wish to find out, though, all about this man."

"If he is the murderer they say he is, and I prove that he is to my satisfaction, then I have a revenge account to settle with him," and the boy's eyes flashed fire, while he continued:

"For, if he is the Marauder Chief, then is he the murderer of those I loved."

"If he is not I will clear from him the cloud upon him now, and I still believe that he is innocent in spite of all appearances against him."

"I kinder feel the same way, Boy Pard."

"I know that you do, Keno Kit; but I shall know just whether he is or not, for I start tomorrow upon my trail, be it long or short, and I swear to follow it to the bitter end, bring it life or death to me."

CHAPTER V.

THE MYSTERIOUS SHOT.

KENO KIT saw that Benito was resolved to carry out his determination, to solve the mystery hanging over Dead Shot Dandy, yet he wished to prevent him from doing so, well knowing the perils the youth would have to face.

"Does yer think thet ther colonel will let yer go?" he asked quietly.

"I shall ask him, Keno Kit, for an unlimited leave, and if he refuses me, I shall demand my discharge from the service, which I can do on account of my age."

"Thet are sol but whar will yer go fust?"

"I will strike for the Rio Grande crossing near where the Marauders are said to have their haunts."

"Yer hain't too well acquainted with ther kentry, Boy Pard."

"No, but I think I have become, under the trailing of Dead Shot Dandy and yourself, a pretty good prairie boy, and I am not afraid of being lost, while that roan stallion I caught some time ago, is the fastest animal, as you know, at the fort, now that Dead Shot's black is not here."

"Yas, yer roan kin give 'em all ther dust, 'ceptin' Dead Shot's black; but a bullet, or a arrer kin go faster than he kin."

"I must take the chances, Keno Kit."

"Oh! you is a good one, an' I'd just as li've as not trust yer as a trailer, fer yer is better now than half ther galoots thet sets themselves up fer scouts."

"But, pard, I hes a leetle game ter perpose."

"What is that, Kit?"

"Thet I goez with yer."

"You?"

"Yas."

"Why, Keno Kit?"

"What is yer *whyn'* about, Boy Pard?"

"My surprise and pleasure at having you go with me."

"Then I goes."

"But can you get off with me?"

"I kin start on a scout ther day afore you does, an' you kin jine me at ther Padre's Rock up in ther chaparral, whar they say Dead Shot kilt Bronze Bill."

"And you mean that no one shall know that we go together?"

"Yas."

"All right, and I think we will solve this mystery."

"You bet we will try— 'Sh! I heard a foot-fall outside."

They ceased talking and a moment after Monte, the chief of scouts, entered the cabin.

He was a man of striking presence, with an athletic form, and a dark, handsome face, that was, however, slightly marred by an expression

which dwelt upon the mouth and in the eyes, which no one could fathom.

"Keno Kit, I have work for you," he said, abruptly.

"All right, pard. What are it?"

"The time of this outlaw's grace for pardon is up, you know."

"What outlaw are thet, Monte?"

"You know well that I mean Dead Shot Dandy," was the angry reply.

"Oh! you does?"

"Yes."

"Waal, what hev thet got ter do with me?"

"As he has not taken advantage of Colonel Du Barry's most generous offer toward him, I intend to have him hunted down, and I wish you to go on his trail."

"Yer does?"

"Yes."

"Waal, I kin go."

"I know that you are most friendly toward the outlaw, or, that is, believe in his innocence; but I believe you will do your duty, so send you in preference to others."

"Give yer orders, Monte," said Keno Kit, quietly.

"My orders are that you start at dawn on the trail of the Marauders."

"Find out their haunts, their force, the best way to surprise them, and all particulars regarding them."

"I'll do it, Pard Monte, fer my own eddification as well as to obey orders, as I thinks Dead Shot hain't goin' ter be found ter be ther leader o' thet gang."

"And I know that he will be."

"Waal, you is chief o' scouts, an' sh'u'd know best."

"I do know that he is the chief of the band."

"Now you are aware of what your duties are, to get off by dawn."

"Then daylight will break on me out o' this camp, Monte— Hello!"

The cry of the scout was caused by a whirling sound and a sharp thud, and beholding an arrow stick quivering into the rear of the log cabin, just opposite the door.

"Ha! what does that mean?" cried Monte, stepping toward the still quivering arrow.

But Benito anticipated his action and springing forward seized the head of the arrow, and tore from it a piece of white paper that was wrapped around it.

"Boy, give me that paper!" cried Monte sternly.

"I will do no such thing," was the cool reply, as the Boy Bugler thrust the piece of paper into his pocket.

"I command you, sir, to obey me!"

"I do not care for your commands, Chief Monte."

"Ha! you refuse to obey?" savagely said the chief.

"Most certainly I do."

"Then I will take it from you by force," and Monte made a step forward.

"Hold on, Monte, for this is my cabin, the arrow was fired into it, and if you attempt to use your brute strength against me I will use steel or lead," and the flashing eyes of the Boy Bugler showed that he meant every word that he uttered.

"Boy, Colonel Du Barry shall know of this, and at once."

"Know of what?"

"That a secret message of some kind has been fired into your cabin, by some one whom you are allied with."

The boy laughed, but said:

"The arrow may have been shot at you, for you have been the target of several shots of late, you know, Monte."

"Yas, yer is standin' in ther light thar, afore the open door," said Keno Kit.

Monte quickly stepped to one side, while he sternly said:

"There is some mystery in this shot and I will solve it, and also, boy, Colonel Du Barry shall know of your conduct."

With this the chief of scouts wheeled on his heel and left the cabin, followed by a derisive laugh from the Boy Bugler.

CHAPTER VI.

A SCRAP OF PAPER.

AS soon as the retreating steps of Monte were no longer heard, Benito turned to Keno Kit and said:

"Well, Kit, he has worked into our hand in sending you off on a scout."

"Yas, but now I is interested in knowin' about thet scrap o' paper yer hes in yer pocket," returned the scout.

"Ah, yes," and the boy drew out the little

piece of paper which had been tightly tied around the head of an arrow.

It was but a small scrap of paper and contained but a few lines, which having glanced at, Benito cried excitedly:

"See here, Keno Kit!"

"See wharf?"

"This piece of paper."

"I sees it."

"Read what it says."

"How in thunder are I ter read what it says when I hev never been taughted?"

"Ah! then I will read it for you."

"I do not know the handwriting, and it gives me strange news."

"Chin less, an' give me ther items o' them marks on thet scrap o' paper, Boy Pard."

"Well, Keno Kit, listen!"

Then Benito read aloud in a distinct, slow tone:

"Benito Dewhurst, your sister Louise still lives."

"No harm has yet befallen her, but she is a captive and unhappy."

"Durnation! is thet what them chicken tracks says?" cried Keno Kit, with considerable excitement.

"Yes; and now, Keno Kit, I have a double reason for going, and another trail to follow."

"Yes; but who was it sent yer thet?"

"I don't know, and only wish I did."

"Can't yer tell?"

"How?"

"I kin tell whether it were a pale-face or Injun thet made a trail."

"I do not know the writing, Kit."

"Waal, let me see ther arrear."

The scout looked at the arrow and said:

"Boy Pard, it are a Comanche arrear."

"No Indian wrote this."

"No."

"Who then?"

"Thar is pale-face captives among some o' ther Injun villages an' maybe yer gal-sister are in a red-skin camp."

"It may be, Kit; but I will find out."

"Yas, we hes ter look her up, too, so we hes double duty ter perform."

"Now, I'll git off at onst, fer fear Monte may change his mind an' send somebody else, an' my advice ter you are thet yer go right to ther col'nel an' show him thet scrap o' paper."

"I will, Kit."

"Then yer kin git yer leave an' j'ine me at Padre's Rock ter-morrer."

"I will; but where was this arrow fired from?"

"Ther top o' ther stockade wall, in course."

"True, for it could have come from nowhere else."

"Thar is whar it come from, an' ther feller thet sent it, be he Injun or pale-face, are skip-pin' off lively now, you bet."

"Now, don't yer lose no time, but skip ter ther col'nel."

"I will go at once, Keno Kit, and to-morrow will join you at the Padre's Rock."

So saying the Boy Bugler left the cabin and hastened on to head-quarters.

In the meantime Monte had not gone straight to see the colonel, upon leaving Benito's cabin, but had made his way directly toward the scout's camp, for three hardy men lived apart from the soldiers and the others of the fort.

Entering a rude shanty Monte came upon a quartette of his men playing cards, and said to one of them, whose dark face, black hair and eyes, and general appearance indicated his race as that of a Mexican:

"Juan, I want you."

"Si senor," and the Mexican arose at once and followed his chief from the cabin.

Walking apart from the sentries, so as to be out of ear-shot of any one, Monte said:

"Juan, your horse is fresh, I believe?"

"Yes, captain, he has had a long rest."

"And you?"

"Am ready for work," and the man spoke with an accent.

"I wish you for more hard service."

"All right, Senor Captain."

"Get your provisions and traps all ready to leave after dawn and follow the trail of Keno Kit, who leaves at daybreak to hunt up the haunts of the Marauders."

"Keno Kit, senor?"

"Yes."

"He is friendly to the Dead Shot and will not do his duty."

"That is just what I wish you to find out for me."

"Yes, senor."

"Do not crowd his trail too close, so that he will see you, but stick to it until he returns to the fort."

"I understand, senor."

"If you see him join the Dead Shot, you can kill him and the Dandy also, but bring the body of the latter to camp."

"I understand, senor."

"Now, Keno Kit goes at dawn, so be ready."

"Yes, senor."

Having thus put a spy upon the track of Keno Kit, Monte went rapidly on toward the head-quarters, where, to his surprise, he found the Boy Bugler seated at the table, talking to Colonel Du Barry.

"Ah! Monte, have you anything to report," said the colonel.

"I have, sir."

"Well?"

"I went to that boy's cabin, Colonel Du Barry, a short while ago to give Keno Kit an order, and while there an arrow was fired into the cabin, coming from some mysterious source."

"So I have heard, Monte," coolly said the colonel.

"I saw about the head of the arrow a piece of paper, and I sought to secure it, but that boy—"

"Pardon me, Monte, but this young gentleman is my bugler, Mr. Benito Dewhurst, and I object to his being called a boy in a tone of derision, for he has shown himself a man in every sense of the word except his years."

"Ah! I meant no offense, sir."

"Then select more respectful language in addressing Mr. Dewhurst."

"Certainly, Colonel Du Barry; but I was fretted that he refused to give me the paper."

"As he had a right to do, for the arrow was fired into his cabin, and you had no right to interfere."

"Then, sir, I have nothing more to say, as you think he did right, other than that it was a most mysterious shot, and there is something mysterious in it."

"True, it is mysterious; yet not suspicious."

"You know of its contents, then?"

"I do."

The chief of scouts seemed to think the colonel would tell him what was written upon the paper; but that officer did no such thing, and Monte said:

"Then I had better put scouts out to find the one who fired the shot, sir?"

"No, that is unnecessary now, as he is doubtless far away before this."

"Is there anything more to communicate, Mr. Monte?"

"No, sir," and the dark face of the scout flushed with anger as he arose and took his departure, leaving the colonel and the Boy Bugler together.

CHAPTER VII.

BENITO GAINS HIS POINT.

HAVING told the colonel his story, of his refusing to allow the chief of scouts to see the scrap of paper, and then shown it to his commander, the Boy Bugler felt that he had the best of Monte by far, and was feeling quite cheerful over the discomfiture of the one who had tried to make him feel that he was a mere boy.

When Monte took his departure, Benito said:

"Now, colonel, I have a favor to ask of you, sir."

"Well, Benito, it is granted," answered the kind-hearted colonel, who had learned to love the poor boy as though he were his own son.

"I thank you, sir."

"What do you wish, my boy?"

"A leave of absence."

"Ah!"

"Yes, sir."

"Where would you go, Benito?"

"I would like, sir, to go off on a little scouting expedition of my own."

"Ah! I see how it is, Benito. This scrap of paper has set you wild to find your poor sister."

Benito did not care to say that he had intended going to see what he could find out about Dead Shot, before he had seen the mysterious piece of paper, and by his silence allowed the colonel to believe that it was his desire to attempt to find his unfortunate sister.

"My son," continued the colonel:

"I will have Captain Lorne take a squaw and go on the hunt for your sister, and you shall accompany him."

"Thank you, colonel, but I prefer to go alone."

"Alone! why, you would be killed by some roving band of Indians, or the Marauder before two days had gone by."

"No, sir, for I have had considerable experience in prairie life, young as I am, and you know I am a good shot, while my roan is a

fect flyer, so I would be on an equality with any ordinary foe, and my horse could outrun any animal sent in chase of me."

"I do not like the idea of your going, Benito."

"I believe, sir, that I could find out something about my sister, sir, and—"

"And what, Benito?"

"And, Colonel Du Barry, I believe, sir, that I can prove to you that I am right in still trusting in Dead Shot Dandy."

"No, no, Benito, I have lost all confidence in that man, for he loves his outlaw life too well to accept my offer to him," sadly said the colonel.

"I have faith in him, sir, and I hope to prove that I am right."

"I cannot let you go alone, Benito."

"But, sir—"

"It is useless to argue, for I will not allow it."

"But if Keno Kit would accompany you—"

"Colonel Du Barry, I will confess to you that Keno Kit is going with me," and Benito then told of the plan he had entered upon with the scout, and how opportunely Monte had dropped in with orders for Keno Kit to start upon the trail of Dead Shot and the Marauders.

"Well, I am glad you will be with one who is second to Dead Shot only as a scout, Benito."

"But when will you go?"

"I will start in the morning, sir, some hours after dawn."

"Very well, my boy; but I beg of you to be careful of your life, for you have a brilliant future before you, and I tell you frankly that I have already written to Washington begging a second-lieutenancy for you for your gallant services, and asking that you may serve as an aide-de-camp to me."

"Oh! Colonel Du Barry!" gasped the happy boy, and it was all he could say, while the colonel continued:

"Now I expect to get your commission, for you have won it a dozen times over, and I have no desire to see you get my boy lieutenant shot."

"I'll be careful of him, sir."

"I do not believe you, for you are as daring a piece of humanity as I ever saw."

"Now you can have your leave of absence, and I'll have Keno Kit shot if he gets you killed, tell him to look out."

"If you make any discovery as to where your sister is, return at once and report to me, and be she in an Indian village or among the Marauders, I will rescue her if I march at the head of every soldier, scout and straggler in my command to do so."

"You are most good to me, Colonel Du Barry."

"You deserve it, Benito, I honestly tell you, with no fear that flattery will spoil you."

After a few more words of warning and advice, the colonel bade the Boy Bugler good-night and wished him God speed in his purpose.

Returning to his cabin he found that Keno Kit had already gone, and he at once set about preparing to start upon his trail in the morning.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE MARAUDERS' DEFIANCE.

THE morning following the interview between Benito and Colonel Du Barry several events of importance happened, which I may as well mention as they occurred.

First, it was rumored that Keno Kit had passed out of the fort before midnight, mounted upon his best horse, and equipped for a scouting expedition, which, it was whispered, had in view the finding of the haunts of the Marauders.

When he learned that Keno Kit had gone hours before the time which he had set for his departure, instead of giving him credit for his promptness, Monte, the chief of scouts, had been furious with him.

Next, out of the fort went Chaparral Juan, as the Mexican scout was called, and this was, the sentinel told Monte, just at dawn, and it became whispered about that he was dispatched by his chief, especially to win the reward offered the body of Dead Shot Dandy, dead or alive.

Hardly had Chaparral Juan disappeared from the fort over a roll in the prairie, when Benito, the Boy Bugler, presented himself at the stockade gate.

He was equipped for a long trail, it seemed, and his roan stallion looked capable of carrying his young rider to the end of it without trouble.

When asked by the hangers-on about the fort where he was going, Benito had said:

"I'm going on a little hunt for big game."

With this he rode away, and glancing back, his eyes fell upon something white sticking upon the gateway.

Instantly he turned back, and riding up to it, saw that it was a piece of paper, upon which was written something in a bold, legible hand.

"It is Dead Shot's writing," he said, and then his face turned pale as he read the following:

"TO COLONEL DUNCAN DU BARRY,
Commanding Fort Blank and Post:—

"SIR:—

"Your generous offer of pardon I decline with contempt, and in return defy your hirelings to attempt to earn the reward you place upon me, dead or alive."

"CAPTAIN DEAD SHOT,
The Marauder of the Rio Grande."

Thrice did Benito read this over, and his face became very pale and he looked anxious.

"What is it, Bugler?" asked a soldier.

"Something for the eyes of Colonel Du Barry," was the reply of the youth, and dismounting, he strode into the colonel's quarters.

"Well, Benito, are you ready to go?" asked the colonel, who had just finished dressing.

"I had already started, sir, but looking back, I caught sight of a piece of paper stuck upon the outside of the stockade gate."

"Indeed! what was it?"

"Here it is, sir."

The colonel took the piece of paper, and his brow grew dark and stern as he read what was written thereon.

"I hope now, Benito, you will not be so silly as to defend that cursed outlaw, Dead Shot Dandy," he said in an angry tone.

"It looks like Dead Shot's writing, sir."

"It is his writing, and by Heaven! he defies me."

"Very well, I accept the defiance, and I shall yet capture him, yes, and hang him, for I'll not show mercy now, and allow him to be shot—Ah, Marie, my child, are you and Lulu ready for breakfast?" and the colonel turned to his daughter, who just then entered the room, looking very beautiful in her morning dress.

"Yes, father, but you look worried."

"I am angry, Marie."

"What have you been doing, Benito, to make father angry, for, as you are here, you must needs be the culprit?" and the maiden turned to the Boy Bugler, who answered:

"Your father must explain, Miss Marie."

"And I will, for Benito has done nothing, Marie, to anger me, though he has just brought me this paper."

"Read it!"

Marie Du Barry took the scrap of paper and read it through, her face paling and flushing by turns.

"Where did you get this?" she asked.

"Off of the stockade gate," answered her father.

"This is strange."

"It is a defiance which Dead Shot shall regret."

"You then think that he wrote it, father?"

"Marie, are you blind?"

"No, sir; I am blessed with remarkably good eyesight."

"You knew the handwriting of Dead Shot Dandy?"

"I do, sir."

"Well?"

"Well what, father?"

"Is not that his writing?"

"It certainly looks like his."

"Looks! that is what Benito said just now."

"It is his handwriting and both you and Benito are blind not to see it."

"Orderly!"

"Yes, sir," and the orderly stepped into the room.

"Ask Captain Lorne and Paymaster Leighton to join me here at once."

The orderly obeyed, and soon the captain arrived.

"Lorne, who wrote this?" and Colonel Du Barry turned down for inspection only the words:

"TO COLONEL DUNCAN DU BARRY,
Commanding Fort Blank and Post."

"It is Dead Shot's handwriting, sir," said Cecil Lorne, with surprise.

"True, and here is the paymaster, and I will hear what he has to say."

"Leighton, kindly tell me who wrote these words?" and the colonel allowed the paymaster to see just what Cecil Lorne had read.

"It is the writing of Dead Shot Dandy, sir, of course," was the reply.

"Are you satisfied now, Marie?" asked the colonel.

"I again say, sir, that it looks like the writ-

ing of Dead Shot Dandy, the outlawed scout," quietly said Marie.

"And you, Benito?"

"I agree with Miss Marie, sir, it does look like Dead Shot's writing."

"Bah! you are both as stubborn as Government mules," impatiently said the colonel, and handing the letter to Captain Lorne, he continued:

"Here, Lorne, read aloud this defiance, which that daring outlaw, in answer to my generous offer of a pardon, coolly tacks upon the stockade gate, under the very nose of my sentinel."

Captain Cecil Lorne read aloud the defiance, and then remained silent, while Paymaster Leighton, whose losses at the hands of the Marauders had made him very bitter, said:

"Dead Shot wrote it, and no one else, and I suppose he thinks he can beard you under your very guns, Colonel Du Barry."

"He will find that he cannot, for, Captain Lorne, I wish you to take several days in which to pick your troopers, scouts and horses, and start against the bold Marauders."

"I will be ready, sir, whenever you desire me to go."

"But what force shall I take?"

"Every man that can be spared from the fort, for I wish this expedition, Lorne, to accomplish much."

"And you go with me, I suppose, Benito?" and the captain turned to the Boy Bugler, who answered:

"No, sir, though I may meet you somewhere."

Then, with a bow, Benito took his departure, and rode off over the prairie, those who saw his departure, equipped as he was, for a stay of some time, wondering whither he was going, and why Colonel Du Barry allowed him to go off alone.

CHAPTER IX.

HEMMED IN ON THE PRAIRIE.

WHEN Colonel Du Barry joined his daughter and Lulu Dale at breakfast, the morning of the departure of Keno Kit and Benito, he was not in his usual genial mood.

The fact is he had greatly admired and respected Dead Shot Dandy, and found it hard to believe the accumulated evidence against him.

But when he was brought face to face with seeming facts, that left no room to doubt his guilt, he had felt angered and hurt at the treachery of the man he had so fully trusted.

When the outlawed scout had again rendered such invaluable service, not only saving the command of Captain Lorne from massacre, but also aiding it in surprising the red-skins, he had issued his proclamation of pardon for Dead Shot Dandy, provided that he would come in and surrender before thirty days.

Then, not only the specified time passed without Dead Shot Dandy taking advantage of his generous offer, but a written defiance was posted upon the walls of the fort, daring the colonel, as it were, to do his worst.

These things disturbed Colonel Du Barry greatly, and he went in to breakfast with no desire to eat his usual hearty meal.

But Lulu Dale never looked more lovely, and, arrayed in one of Marie's dresses, which was most becoming to her, greeted him with all the warmth that a loving daughter might bestow upon a father.

She had recovered from her wound, and having cast aside her male attire looked the beautiful, innocent girl she was.

And never before had she appeared so brilliant, until the colonel soon lost his ill-humor and became his natural self once more.

After breakfast Lulu proposed a ride, and Marie seconding it, the two maidens, the colonel and Captain Cecil Lorne started off for a brisk gallop over the prairies.

As the troops had been circulating about the fort in squads a great deal of late, and Keno Kit, Chaparral Juan and Benito were known to have gone out that morning, the colonel declined to take an escort, stating that there was no danger.

Instinctively it seemed, Lulu led the way, riding with the colonel.

Although she laughed and chatted continually she kept her eyes almost constantly upon the prairie, and had her companions attentively watched her, they would have observed that she was following a trail.

A league from the fort they passed through a clump of timber, and, after watering their horses at a spring, they held on toward the distant chaparral.

Several times the colonel had hinted at returning, but each time the pretty girl had urged

that they go a little further and had had her way.

At length another clump of timber was reached, and they flanked it, as Captain Lorne said that it was not safe to attempt to ride through thick woods.

Then the Red Chaparral loomed up ahead, and Colonel Du Barry said:

"Now we must go back, for we know not what danger lurks in yonder chaparral."

"Do you think that there is danger to us then, sir?" asked Lulu gayly.

"There may be, for the chaparral is the haunt of both Marauders and red-skins, and once within its retreats, no one can pursue them other than our scouts."

"Does not this trail lead into it, colonel?"

"Yes, Lulu, it enters just where you see yonder tree rising high above the others."

"And leads through the chaparral?"

"Yes."

"Is this the trail that goes by Padre's Rock?" she asked.

"Yes."

"I must go there some time, for I would like to see the spot where my poor father died."

All her joyous nature had become clouded at once, and wishing to change the subject, the colonel said:

"I will escort you there some day; but now we must turn back."

"Come, Lorne, to the right-about, and we follow going back," called out the colonel, in lively tones.

With military promptness, Cecil Lorne and Marie Du Barry wheeled their horses, as did also Colonel Du Barry and Lulu, and from the lips of each broke a cry of amazement as they did so.

And no wonder they were amazed, and alarmed, too, for within rifle-range of them, having ridden out of the thick clump of timber where they had been concealed, were a dozen Indians, mounted and pressing toward them.

And worse still, they had spread out in a half-circle, the ends being almost even with the party, and thus cutting them off from all flight, except toward the chaparral.

"Quick! we must ride for the chaparral," cried the colonel, realizing fully their danger.

"No, colonel, for they must have a larger force there, as they seem to wish to drive us in that direction," called out Cecil Lorne.

"True, Lorne; then we must break their line as best we can."

"Come, girls, you ride between the captain and myself."

The officers then placed themselves upon either side of the maidens, and the four moved forward in line at a gallop, all of them with drawn revolvers, for both Marie and Lulu were armed also.

Realizing their determination, the red-skins rode toward a common center, not only to head them off, but also maneuvering in such a way that they would still keep them surrounded.

"We have been caught napping, Lorne, and are two against twelve," quietly said the colonel, as they dashed on.

"Four against twelve, sir, for you will find that we are not to be despised in fighting for our lives," returned Lulu.

As she spoke, several of the red-skins who had guns, at a given signal raised their weapons, and fired directly upon the party.

The bullets whistled closely about them, and though none of the four were hurt, the animal ridden by Cecil Lorne went down with a broken leg; but his rider caught nimbly upon his feet, and called out:

"Dash on, colonel, and break through, for I can take care of myself!"

CHAPTER X.

AN UNEXPECTED ARRIVAL.

WHEN Captain Cecil Lorne called out what he did, after the fall of his horse, as quickly as they could rein in their animals the others did so, while Lulu announced in ringing tones:

"We are not made of that kind of stuff, Captain Lorne, to desert a friend in distress."

"No, Lorne, we will remain here and fight it out," said the colonel.

Instantly Cecil Lorne put his revolver to the head of his wounded horse and pulled the trigger, while he said:

"Poor fellow, I'll put you out of your suffering, and we'll make sure of you too."

"Aid the ladies to dismount, please, colonel, and we'll make breastworks of our horses, and the firing will be heard at the fort and bring relief."

"You are right, Lorne. Come, girls," said the colonel.

Quickly the two maidens sprang to the ground, just as the Indians uttered wild yells of triumph, and charged upon the little party with greater speed.

Quick as he could do so, Cecil Lorne then killed the other three horses, dropping them in such a way that they made a breastwork, and then they all sprung into the little fort and crouched down, just as a volley of bullets and arrows were fired upon them from the charging savages.

The shots hit the bodies of the animals with a sickening thud, and Marie shuddered, for she had never before been in such a scene; but Lulu took the affair with a coolness that amounted to indifference.

"Cowards! they intend to kill us at long range."

"But better that than become their captives," said the colonel, as he glanced with grief-filled eyes toward his daughter and Lulu.

"No, sir, I fear it is their intention to take us alive," and Cecil Lorne pointed to how the Indians were forming in a compact mass, as though to ride down upon them in a body and thus end the affair by a hand-to-hand struggle with the men.

"Look out, sir! here they come!" shouted Cecil Lorne.

"Ay, ay, captain."

"Empty every barrel of your revolver but one, and keep that shot for my poor child, while I will kill you, Lulu, for better such a death than a life-time of misery as a Comanche's captive," and the colonel's voice trembled as he spoke.

"Oh how fearful!" cried Marie, as the Indians, riding four abreast, came on at the full speed of their horses, yelling like demons, and firing shots over the heads of the party to unnerve them.

Nearer and nearer they came, until suddenly a wild war-cry was heard that arose above the yells of the Comanches, and then followed the rattling ring of a repeating-rifle.

"Dead Shot's war-cry among a thousand!" shouted Captain Lorne, and the eyes of the little party now fell upon a horseman riding like the wind to their rescue, while his repeating-rifle was at his shoulder sending forth flash after flash, and bullet after bullet, directly upon the Indians.

Down went a pony in advance, then a warrior tumbled from his saddle, and another followed, while the fourth shot dropped a second horse.

At the fifth shot the chief of the red band was seen to reel in his saddle, clutch at the mane of his pony, grasp at the air, and fall in a heap upon the ground.

This brought the red-skins to a sudden halt.

But straight at them rode the daring horseman, his black steed fairly flying over the prairie.

Seeing that their foes must escape them, the red-skins now charged upon their single enemy who so daringly rode down upon them.

"By Heaven! but I will aid him, outlaw though he be," cried Colonel Du Barry, springing over the dead horse in his front.

But Cecil Lorne was by his side, revolver in hand, and calling to the maidens to remain where they were, the two officers sprang toward the scene of unequal combat.

But suddenly they saw Dead Shot Dandy, for he indeed it was, throw himself from his saddle, and, springing away from his horse, open upon the charging band with a revolver in each hand.

There was a rattling volley, a flying of bullets and arrows through the air, and then six warriors, just one-half of the band, went flying away over the prairie, while four riderless ponies were galloping about in wild fright.

Springing again into the saddle, and unheeding the coming of the officers toward him, Dead Shot went off like an arrow.

In a moment they saw his motive.

It was to catch the four Indian ponies, and for a magnificent horse, such as was the black ridden by the outlawed scout, it was but short work, for he had soon roped the four animals.

Returning to Lulu and Marie, Colonel Du Barry and Cecil Lorne stood awaiting the coming of Dead Shot, their bosoms filled with strange emotions and a glad light upon the face of Marie Du Barry, while Lulu seemed pale and nervous.

Leading the four ponies up to the spot, Dead Shot Dandy raised his broad sombrero politely, and said:

"Colonel Du Barry, accept these animals, such as they are, in place of those you were forced to slay, and permit me to suggest that

you return at once to the fort, as there are other red-skins abroad."

"Duke Decatur, from my very soul I thank you, for myself, these four girls, and Captain Lorne, for no greater service was ever rendered than that which you have done but now."

"I have but done my duty, Colonel Du Barry, and care not for thanks."

"Good morning, sir."

Without a glance at Marie, Lulu, or Captain Lorne, he raised his sombrero again and was turning away, when Colonel Du Barry stepped quickly forward and called out:

"Hold, Decatur!"

"Well, sir."

"You care not for my thanks, but I will here give you my free pardon for all you have done in the past, and beg that you return with us to the fort."

All waited the reply in breathless eagerness. They saw the handsome face flush up and then grow pale, while the dark blue eyes flashed fire. Then the reply, in cold cutting tones, came from Dead Shot Dandy:

"Colonel Duncan Du Barry, I neither seek pardon at your hands nor accept it."

Without another word Dead Shot Dandy wheeled his horse to dash away, when Lulu Dale sprang toward him and cried in a ringing voice:

"Hold, Captain Dead Shot, or I will kill you!"

CHAPTER XI.

LULU'S SHOT.

AT the sudden and wholly unexpected cry of Lulu Dale, Dead Shot wheeled in his saddle and looked back at her, while Colonel Du Barry, Cecil Lorne and Marie were startled by her act and threatening words.

But although he saw that Lulu had her revolver leveled full at him, and there was determination in her heart to fire, and thus keep her word, he did not halt but rode on.

"Your death be on your own head," cried the maiden, and she pulled the trigger, just as Marie Du Barry struck up the weapon, and the bullet whistled harmlessly over the head of the scout.

At the shot he turned his horse to the right-about, and reining him back on his haunches, sat there in silence gazing upon her.

"Oh! why did you do that, Marie Du Barry! Let me kill him, for he will escape!" cried Lulu, as Marie grasped the weapon with a firm hold that could not be shaken off.

"Would you kill a man who has just saved you from a fate worse than death?" said Marie Du Barry, bravely, while her father and Cecil Lorne were completely unnerved for the instant by the startling acts of the two girls.

"Ay, would I kill him, for that man is Captain Dead Shot, the Marauder, and he killed my father!" almost shrieked Lulu Dale, trying in vain to release her revolver from the grasp of Marie Du Barry.

At these words from the lips of the almost frantic girl Dead Shot Dandy uttered a light laugh, and touching his splendid black with the spurs he bounded away over the prairie, just as the clatter of hoofs was heard and Mont the chief of scouts dashed up, followed by a score of his men.

"On, men, on, for the colonel needs not our aid now I see, and yonder game must be run down!" shouted Monte.

"Hold!"

"Halt!"

The commands broke in ringing tones from the lips of Colonel Du Barry and Captain Lorne, and the scouts, who were dashing by, half-reined up, when Monte yelled:

"I'll stop with the colonel, boys, and you go on after Dead Shot, and take him dead or alive!"

A cheer greeted these words, but in an instant Cecil Lorne had leaped to the head of Monte's horse, and seizing the reins, cried:

"Call off your men, Monte, the Mexican, and at once, or I send a bullet through your heart!"

Monte knew Cecil Lorne was not one to make an idle threat, and he saw that he dared not parley, so he gave a loud call to his scouts, and instantly they wheeled to the right-about.

"Ho, pards! the orders are to let the outlaw go to do more mischief," he cried.

"Monte, I will have no comments, sir, from you."

"I propose to let Dead Shot go at this time, for we owe him more than life, and you will return with us to the fort as an escort," sternly said Colonel Du Barry.

Monte was not a man to go against his own

interests, and, although he knew that he was not speaking the truth, he said:

"As you please, colonel; but seeing, as I did, that Captain Dead Shot, the Marauder, had led a band of Indians upon you, I naturally wished to capture him."

"You saw no such thing, sir, for Dead Shot saved us from those Indians when we had given up all hope."

"Let your men place our saddles and bridles upon those Indian ponies, and we will return at once to the fort."

Monte gave the orders, and the party started back, Lulu again riding by the side of Colonel Du Barry.

The young girl was very pale, and seemed nervous, and they rode along in silence for some time, when the colonel asked:

"Lulu, why did you attempt to kill the scout as you did?"

"Because I have sworn to avenge my father's death," the little beauty said savagely.

"And that is the man who killed your father?"

"Yes."

"You are sure of this?"

"He is the man who brought me the money at the Brent Hacienda."

"Sure?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then there can be no doubt, and I am confident too, that Dead Shot is the Marauder chief."

"And yet you allowed him to escape."

"Bah! Monte and his men could never have captured him, and besides, see how he disarmed me."

"How do you mean, sir?"

"Why, he had just saved us from a fearful death."

"I am revengeful, Colonel Du Barry, and if he saved me from a hundred deaths, I would not forgive him my father's murder."

"Then you still feel revengeful toward him, Lulu?"

"I do, and I will yet reap my revenge, for I have sworn it."

"Ah, Lulu, I would forgive that man to-night, and pardon him for all he has done in the past if he would but come in and surrender himself, throwing himself upon my mercy."

"I would not forgive him, Colonel Du Barry, and more, I never shall," was the almost savage response of Lulu Dale, as they rode up to the fort, where the garrison was under arms, for that something had happened of an unusual occurrence, all knew, as Monte had said he feared danger, and had ridden off half an hour after the departure of the colonel and his party.

The firing had also been heard at the fort, and half a hundred troopers were ready to dash out to the rescue, when the sentinel reported the party returning at a leisurely pace, that showed all danger was over.

CHAPTER XII.

LULU'S PLOT.

THE determined effort made by Lulu Dale to kill Dead Shot Dandy, and thus avenge her father, had pained Marie Du Barry most deeply.

She had taken the daughter of the dead scout to her heart as a girl who had been unfortunate, and had nursed her with sisterly care through her suffering.

She had learned to love the wayward, but true-hearted girl, and she could not understand how Lulu could feel revengefully toward one who had twice saved her from death, or a fate to her far worse, in becoming the captive of cruel Indians.

"You are angry with me, Marie," said Lulu, when the two were alone in their room at the fort.

"No, Lulu, only hurt," was the answer.

"Marie, in all my life I had but one person to love, and that was my poor father."

"He died by violence, not by the hand of one whom he was attacking but in a spirit of assassination, and I cannot forgive his slayer."

"I am sorry that you are hurt with me, and regret my act to-day before you, whom I know to feel a tender regard for that man."

"I was hasty, and should have bided my time."

"It is forgotten and forgiven, Lulu," said Marie frankly, and she kissed the young girl affectionately, and the feeling of coldness between the two was at an end.

In his own quarters Colonel Du Barry and Cecil Lorne were discussing the adventures of the day, and they both seemed worried greatly.

"I tell you, Lorne, that man is a wonder," said the colonel, referring to Dead Shot.

"He is indeed, sir, and it is such deeds as he

has to-day done that cause me to believe, after all, that there must be some mistake," returned the young officer.

"Yet you heard his defiant words to me?"

"About the pardon?"

"Yes."

"He said he would neither ask nor accept a pardon?"

"Yes; those were his words."

"It is strange, sir, if he is guilty, that he does not accept a pardon."

"It is, indeed; but I am determined to hunt him down, Lorne."

"And kill him?"

"No."

"What then, sir?"

"I wish you to start in a few days, as I before ordered, and you are to give your men special orders that Dead Shot Dandy is to be taken alive."

"Yes, sir."

"When he is in my power I will bring him to terms and pardon him."

"I hope he will come to terms, sir, for the whole fort is kept in a perfect ferment by the present situation of affairs."

"I think we can manage him when we get him here, Lorne."

"I trust so, colonel."

"Now what do you think of that determined and revengeful little spitfire, old Bronze Bill's daughter?"

"I hardly know what to think, sir."

"Nor do I."

She certainly is a lady, Colonel Du Barry, refined in manner, well educated, and yet she can ride like a Comanche, throw a lariat as well as Benito, and is an unerring shot, while she has immense pluck and nerve."

"She has, indeed, and a little revenge toward Dead Shot."

"She would have killed him to-day, sir, had not Miss Du Barry struck up her hand, for she was as firm as iron."

"Yes, and he did not suspect her intention."

"Well, I shall try and tone her down a little, with Marie's aid, and she will make a splendid woman."

And so thought Cecil Lorne, who had become deeply interested in the young girl.

But while the colonel and the captain were discussing her, Lulu Dale was secretly making preparations to take her departure from the fort.

She had gotten out her male attire and fixed it up in good condition, burnished her weapons, and had all in readiness when darkness came on.

Then she set about planning her flight from the fort, for well she knew that Colonel Du Barry would never permit her to depart, did he suspect her intention.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE MIDNIGHT FLIGHT.

"CAPTAIN LORNE, can you tell me of any officer or scout in the fort who has a good horse to sell?"

The one who addressed the question to Captain Lorne was Lulu Dale, and she had gone out behind the piazza of the head-quarters where that officer was seated, enjoying a smoke.

"Rising politely, he asked:

"Who wants to buy, Miss Lulu?"

"I do."

"You?"

"Yes, for the horse I rode from home was killed, you know, and the one the colonel gave me met the same fate to-day."

"True, and as I killed your horse to-day, Miss Lulu, will you do me the honor of accepting an animal in its place from me?"

"No, Captain Lorne, I will not, though I thank you for your kindness."

"You killed the horse to protect our lives; but, if you have a good animal you can sell me, I will buy him with pleasure."

"I have no horse of my own to sell, but Major Burke, when he left the fort some weeks ago, left his favorite horse in my charge, with a request to sell him, if he recovered from a wound he had received."

"The animal has wholly recovered, and is a beautiful black and very fast."

"In fact, with the major's weight, and he was a very large man, the black could keep ahead of the regiment in a race or in a long march."

"Now, if you will accept the horse, he is at your service, and we will try him now."

"I must decline your generous offer; but I will buy him, and will take him without trial."

"What is his price?"

"The major set no price upon him, Miss Lulu."

"Then what is he worth?"

"Take him at your own price, Miss Lulu."

Lulu coolly took from her pocket a roll of bills and said:

"Here are two hundred dollars, Captain Lorne."

"Is the amount sufficient?"

"More than enough, Miss Lulu."

"No, give that sum to Major Burke for his horse; and now will you go with me to see my purchase?"

The captain accompanied the maiden, and she seemed delighted with the animal, ordering him at once taken to the colonel's stables.

That night, when all was quiet about the fort, a slender form glided out of the colonel's cabin and went in the direction of the head-quarter stables.

The groom slept there, and was at once aroused by the visitor, at whom he looked with surprise.

"Lead out my horse, Dolan," was the order.

"Your horse, sir?"

"Yes."

"I don't know you, sir, though you have the look of an officer," said the groom, politely.

"I am Miss Dale, Dolan, and I wish the horse I purchased to day and left in your care; get her ready with my saddle and bridle, which was taken from the dead animal, shot under me the night I came."

"The saddle and trappings are all here, miss; but I can't take them out without orders from the colonel."

"Ha! Then I must act for myself."

"Hold out your hands, sir."

The man would have demurred, but a pistol muzzle was thrust into his face, and he obeyed, while he said:

"The colonel will punish me, miss."

"No, for he would rather have you obey and live than disobey and die."

"You wouldn't kill me, miss?"

"Refuse to do as I order you and see," was the significant reply.

"Out with your hands, sir!"

He held them out, and a pair of handcuffs were clipped upon them instantly, while she said quietly:

"I have another pair here, Dolan, for one other, so you will not be alone in your misery."

"Now open your mouth, for I do not care to hear your tuneful voice raised in alarm."

A gag, which she had prepared for the event, evidently, was thrust into his mouth and made fast behind his head.

Then she made him sit down upon the open steps leading to the loft, and with leather reins tied him fast.

"Now, Dolan, I must leave you," she said, and quickly she felt in the darkness for her own superb saddle and bridle, and put them on the horse she had that day purchased.

Then she left the stable, leading the animal, and halted in a clump of trees, not far from the gate in the stockade which led to the outer camps.

A sentinel was always kept there; but, as the camps were on that side, his duties were to keep soldiers in the fort, and those outside from entering, rather than watch for foes.

"If he detects that I am not an officer at the fort, I must handcuff and gag him too," muttered the daring girl as she rode up to the sentinel, who promptly halted her and demanded the countersign.

"Dismount friend, advance and give the countersign!" was promptly obeyed by the disguised girl.

But, as she had feared the sentinel saw that she was not one of the garrison, and said, bluntly:

"Who are you?"

"I gave you the countersign, my man, and that should be sufficient."

"But I don't know you."

"That has nothing to do with it."

"I must call the corporal of the guard, sir, under the circumstances."

"My man, I am a friend of Colonel Du Barry, and I entered the fort by the main gate, and am going over to the camps."

"I have given you the countersign, and I wish you to stand aside and let me pass."

"It may be all right, sir; but these are ticklish times, and I must do my duty."

"If the corporal says it is all right you can go of course."

The sentinel was about to call the guard, when a revolver was shoved into his face, and he saw that it was cocked and a finger upon the trigger, while he heard the words:

"Fool! I tell you I am all right, and as you will not believe me, then I shall force you to terms."

"Hold out your hands, sir, and if you utter a word I will kill you!"

To a man in his situation, the sentinel had but to obey, and still holding the revolver in his face with her left hand, Lulu quickly slipped the handcuffs upon his wrists with her right, and the soldier was at her mercy.

"Now, my man, as I do not wish to leave this gate exposed, as soon as I get my horse out, I will release you," she said.

The key was then turned in the lock, the heavy log gate swung open, and the horse was led through.

"Now, soldier, when I have mounted I will toss you your musket back over the stockade, but your wrists must remain bound, for I will risk no shot as I ride off."

"As to who I am you will soon know, for you had better send the corporal to release the colonel's groom, Dolan, who is in a worse predicament than you are."

"Good-night!"

So saying Lulu passed out through the gate carrying the sentinel's musket.

Mounting her horse, she threw the gun over the stockade and dashed away, while the sentinel sung out, lustily:

"Corporal of the guard!"

Finding his gun he seized it and fired a shot, while the whole fort was at once in an uproar of alarm.

When at last the real facts leaked out, a half an hour had passed, and Colonel Du Barry knew that in the darkness pursuit was useless, as no one could tell which way the midnight fugitive had gone.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE DOUBLE TRAIL.

It will be remembered by the reader that Benito, the Boy Bugler, started away from the fort in broad daylight.

He had his rendezvous appointed with Keno Kit, at Padre's Rock, and yet he was always willing to learn what he could of prairie-craft, and seeing the trail of the scout's horse, he started to follow it to its destination.

He knew well the tracks of the animal which Keno Kit rode, from some peculiarity of the hoof which the scout had pointed out to him, and he had no difficulty in following the trail.

Soon, however, he discovered that other tracks mingled with those made by Keno Kit's horse.

The animal that made them had come from the direction of the fort, that was evident.

Could it be Monte, following Keno Kit after having given him his orders, he wondered?

At any rate, the two tracks were plainly visible, and one was certainly made by the horse of Keno Kit.

Who was the rider of the second horse Benito proposed to find out.

The trail led to the red chaparral, and entered that wild fastness of tree-land.

Knowing, as he did, the point for which Keno Kit was making, Benito was master of the situation, so he made a detour through the chaparral and came out at a point some miles ahead.

Here he concealed his horse, and glancing at the trail saw that Keno Kit had passed by, for there were the tracks of his horse, but those of his follower were not visible.

Hardly had he made this discovery when a horseman came in sight.

Crouching back in the brush, Benito waited to see just who he was.

He was well aware that, if discovered, it might come to a deadly encounter; but Benito was one who was ready to take those chances.

As the horseman drew near he saw just who he was.

"Chaparral Juan, the Mexican scout," muttered the Boy Bugler. "But what can he want following Keno Kit?"

"Ah! I remember, he hates Kit because he won his money from him at cards, and threatened to kill him, the boys say."

"I wonder if he has followed Kit to kill him."

"If so, I'll be in at the killing, I reckon."

The boy crouched close in the thicket, and without suspecting his presence the Mexican passed by, his eyes bent upon the trail.

"It is only a mile to Padre's Rock, so I'll go it on foot, for he would hear my horse."

"Ah! I can cut him off by the grape-vine trail," cried Benito, remembering a trail accessible to a man but not to a horse, which would make a short cut to a point near the Padre's Rock.

Hastening along on foot the boy soon came in

sight of the Padre's Rock, and saw Keno Kit's horse staked out near it.

Then he caught sight of the scout building a fire to cook his dinner.

"Now I'll see what Mister Chaparral Juan wants," said Benito, hiding in a thicket.

He waited some time, and, as the scout did not appear, he began to think that he had put back, upon discovering that Keno Kit was not a Marauder or an Indian scout.

But just then he saw Chaparral Juan come in sight and observed the cause of his delay.

He had left his horse hidden back upon the trail and was on foot.

Cautiously he came forward and halted within ten feet of Benito, and just at a bend of the trail, from whence he had a good view of Padre's Rock and Keno Kit at his fire, and not a hundred yards distant.

"I guess I'll never get a better chance, Keno Kit, to square accounts between us than now, so I'll do it," said the Mexican, speaking in his own tongue, which Benito spoke as well as he did English, having been taught it by his mother.

"The comrades say," continued Juan, "that you carry a snug sum about with you, and I'll fall heir to it, and tell Monte that I found you dead."

"Now, Keno Kit, I would like to let you know who kills you, but I dare not, for you are a dangerous man."

As the intended assassin spoke he raised his rifle slowly to his shoulder, resting the barrel against a mesquite tree.

But before he could touch the trigger there came a flash and report near by, and with a yell of pain and terror, Chaparral Juan sprung to his feet and darted away like a deer, his left hand hanging shattered and bleeding at his side as he ran.

It was Benito who had fired the shot, determined to mark the wretch, for he did not intend to kill him, or wish to do so.

When the running feet were no longer heard, Benito arose from his hiding-place, took up the rifle of Chaparral Juan and stepped into full view of Keno Kit, who had hastily taken cover upon hearing the shot.

"Hello, Kit, where are you?"

"I are here, Boy Pard; but what in thunder does yer come on a man in that style for?"

"Yer'll never make a trailer if yer shoots jist ter burn powder," and Keno Kit stepped into view from the thicket surrounding Padre's Rock and advanced toward the youth, evidently chagrined at having "taken cover" so quickly from no cause that he could see.

Benito burst out into a laugh, and grasping the hand of Keno Kit, told him about Juan having been on his trail.

"Here is his gun, Kit."

"Yas, an' it hev got yer bullet-mark on it, jist whar his hand were, an' this red stain do show thet yer hit him."

"I broke his hand at the wrist, or at least I shot to do so."

"Oh, yer did it, then."

"Waal, it will do him good an' keep him out o' wickedness fer awhile."

"But whar is yer horse?"

"Back in the chaparral."

"Waal, go arter him, an' I'll git dinner, fer tain't likely yer'll find Chaparral Juan again."

"No, I think he has made for the fort at full speed to get his hand doctored," and Benito started after his horse.

In half an hour he returned on his splendid roan stallion and reported that Chaparral Juan had made tracks at full speed, mounted his horse and gone toward the fort.

"Waal, we'll grapple some grub, Boy Pard, an' git inter a more safer kentry fer us than this be," said Keno Kit, and soon after the two friends started off upon their trail of discovery.

CHAPTER XV.

CECIL LORNE AND PRAIRIE PETE.

The morning after the escape of Lulu Dale from the fort, Captain Lorne was early at work, preparing for the march, for it was his intention to start with his command as soon as all could be gotten ready.

This intention the going of the maiden had caused, as he had no idea that she should go roaming about the prairies alone, brave as she was and well versed though she might be in prairie craft.

He had become more deeply interested in the young girl than he cared to admit, even to himself, and as soon as the alarm was given by the sentinel, and it was discovered who it was that

had so cleverly escaped from the fort, he had asked permission of Colonel Du Barry to get his men ready for the expedition at once.

The colonel granted the request willingly, and Monte was told to have his scouts ready to move early the next morning, while the soldiers would follow in the afternoon and join them at the Padre's Rock, which was to be the camping-ground the first night out.

The laugh upon the sentinel and groom, at being so cleverly captured by a young girl, Cecil Lorne did not join in, for he was most anxious about the safety of that same beautiful maiden, who had so daringly gone out upon a trail of revenge upon the slayer of her father.

In fact the young officer became so fearful for her safety, that he bade Lieutenant Lancaster to come on with the command, as soon as all were ready, while he signified his intention of going on in advance.

"You will surely take Monte and his men with you, Lorne?" said Colonel Du Barry.

"I will take Prairie Pete, colonel, and I need no better man, and Monte can follow at noon, for frankly, I do not like the man, nor do I trust him fully."

"I have the same feeling, Lorne, though not one act can I recall against Monte."

"Nor I, sir; but good-by, colonel, and I hope to bring you good news of that wild girl, the Marauders and Dead Shot Dandy upon my return."

Calling to the scout he had selected to accompany him, Cecil Lorne mounted his horse and rode out of the fort.

Prairie Pete was another of the characters at the fort, and a good deal like Keno Kit in his appearance.

He was brave as a lion, a thorough scout, blunt and honest, and had passed two-thirds of his life upon the prairies.

"Waal cap'n, which way?" he asked, as they rode out of the fort.

"Did you find the trail of Miss Dale's horse, as I asked you, Pete?"

"Yas, cap'n."

"Can you follow it?"

"As fer as it goes, cap'n."

"Then we will strike that trail, Pete."

"Yas, cap'n," and five minutes after Prairie Pete had struck the trail of Lulu's horse and was following it with perfect ease.

Straight to the Red Chaparral it led, and then along the trail to Padre's Rock.

"Well, Pete, it has not brought us out of our way?"

"No, cap'n; but while you rest a leetle, I'll jist scout round some."

"Do you see something suspicious, Pete?"

"I hes seen s'gus thet look curious, cap'n."

Staking his horse out Prairie Pete started on foot to scout about the vicinity, while Cecil Lorne sat down by Padre's Rock to eat his dinner.

In half an hour the scout returned and quietly taking his seat began to eat his midday meal.

"Well, Pete?"

"What did you discover?"

"Yas, cap'n."

"Cap'n thar hes been moosic in this vicinity."

"How do you mean, Pete?"

"Waal, sir, I seen four trails comin' this way."

"Four?"

"Yas, cap'n, fer thar were ther gal's, thet are one."

"Yes."

"An' she made ther las' one."

"And the others?"

"One were made by Keno Kit's horse."

"Ah!"

"Yas, an' another were made by thet Boy Boogler's roan mustang."

"Indeed!"

"Sartin, fer I knows ther hoofs at ther fort putty well."

"And the other?"

"Were made by ther horse o' thet 'tarnal scout, Chaparral Juan."

"No!"

"Fact."

"And what do you make out of all this, Pete?"

"I makes, cap'n, thet Keno Kit come fust, Chaparral Juan come next, then ther Boy Boogler, an' last Chaparral Juan, thet durned Mexican."

"This is strange."

"Thar is nuthin' stranger, cap'n, fer right over thar is foot-tracks o' two men."

"One of 'em come from whar he left his horse in ther chap'ral, an' t'other come from whar his critter were in ther bushes hidin'."

"Now one of 'em were Chap'ral Juan, an' he got ther wurst o' it."
 "The worst of it?"
 "Yas, cap'n, fer thar is blood-spots from whar he left his hidin'-place clean back to his critter."
 "And who was the other?"
 "His tracks showed him ter be ther Boy Boogler."
 "Ah! and you think that he and Keno Kit met Chaparral Juan and they had trouble?"
 "No, cap'n, Keno Kit were here, an' Juan an' ther boy were thar, an' they hed trouble."
 "Then Keno Kit an' ther Boy Boogler went yonder-ways, fer yer sees thar trail plain."
 "Yas, and Chaparral Juan?"
 "Tuk out fer his horse, an' struck off on another trail which I did not foller."
 "And Miss Dale?"
 "She comed on here ter ther rock, for thar is her horse-tracks, an' thar yer see her leetle foot-print."
 "And then?"
 "We'll see which way she tuk from here, an' I'll be ready soon as I chaws a leetle more grub, cap'n," and Prairie Pete began again upon his dinner with the relish of a hungry man.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE MARAUDERS AT WORK.

KNOWING that his troops would not arrive at the Padre's Rock before sunset, Captain Lorne felt that he had several hours in which to prosecute the search for Lulu Dale.
 In case that he might be detained longer, he wrote a line to Lieutenant Lancaster, and stuck it upon a stick, telling him to remain in camp at the Padre's Rock until his return.
 "Now, Prairie Pete, I am ready," he said.
 "An' I is, too, cap'n," remarked the scout, and saddling his horse, he set off on foot, the animal following.
 Striking the trail of the maiden, after following it for awhile, he said:
 "Cap'n, she hes stayed round here considibul, an' then sot off on ther trail back inter ther chap'ral."
 "Follow it then, Pete."
 "I'll do it," and again the scout began his work, going on foot, his horse close behind him, and Cecil Lorne following and wondering at the wonderful sagacity of the prairie-man, which amounted almost to the instinct of a hound.
 "She hev tuk ther trail arter Chap'ral Juan, sir."
 "Indeed?"
 "Yas, cap'n."
 "Why has she done that?"
 "Maybe it were ter see what them blood-spots meant, fer yer knows wimmies is cur'us, cap'n."
 Cecil Lorne smiled at the idea of the scout, that curiosity alone had prompted Lulu Dale to follow Chaparral Juan; but he said:
 "Well, Pete, we will soon know why she came this way, so push on rapidly, as the trail is a plain one."
 "Yas, cap'n, I c'u'd foller it with my eyes shet."
 So saying, Prairie Pete sprung into his saddle, and set off at a lively pace, Captain Lorne closely following.
 After a short distance had been gone over the scout halted suddenly.
 "What is it, Pete?"
 "Thar was two fellers meetet Juan here."
 "Two men?"
 "Yas."
 "You are sure they did not meet the girl?" anxiously asked the captain.
 "No, ther trail was made at ther same time thar Chap'ral Juan's was."
 "Yer see, he were ridin' fast, an' they was coming t'other way an' met him."
 "Then they tarned an' rode back with him, an' all three went at a lively clip, as ther hoof-marks shows."
 "What scouts are away from the fort, Pete?"
 "None."
 "You are sure?"
 "Only Juan an' Keno Kit, onless yer counts Dead Shot Dandy."
 "Who could they be?"
 "They wasn't no scouts from ther fort, cap'n, fer, as I tole yer, I knows ther hoof-marks o' every critter they rides."
 "You certainly have a wonderful knowledge of trailing, Pete."
 "Oughter, cap'n, fer I hes been at it fer nigh thirty year."
 "I cannot believe that any one can be better."
 "Dead Shot Dandy are better, cap'n, fer he

takes to it nat'ral like, as a Injun do, an' I hed ter larn it."
 "Then thar is Keno Kit thet can lay over me; but 'ceptin' them two, I don't take a back seat fer none others."
 "What is it now, Prairie Pete?" asked Captain Lorne, as he saw that the scout had made some new discovery.
 "Here are whar ther gal camped."
 "To-day at noon?"
 "I guesses so, cap'n."
 "Then she cannot be so far ahead of us now?"
 "Waal, cap'n, it depends on how she hev rid—Hello!"
 "Well, Pete?"
 "Cap'n, thar hev been hot work here."
 "Quick! what is it, Pete?"
 "See them tracks?"
 "Yas."
 "See thet ther horse turned about suddin?"
 "It seems so."
 "It are so, an' it were a lasso thet made him twist thet way."
 "A lasso?"
 "Yas, cap'n, he were catched, an' ef yer notice thet red spot, it are whar a man laid and bleded."
 "You are sure it was a man?"
 "It were bound ter be, fer ther gal's horse were here, an' thar is whar them gerloots was thet lariatet her."
 "But it do look as tho' she'd got in a shot afore they hed her complete."
 "Now ter look fer a grave."
 "A grave, Pete?"
 "Yas, cap'n, an' then we kin tell ef she hit ther bull's-eye or not."
 "I do not understand you, Pete."
 "We kin see ef she sent her bullet fer ther heart."
 "Ah, yes."
 "An' thar are ther grave, cap'n," and Prairie Pete pointed to a freshly made mound.
 Cecil Lorne galloped toward the grave and then said:
 "If they stopped to dig this and bury one of their number, they cannot be far ahead, so push on lively, Pete."
 Prairie Pete obeyed by starting forward at a canter.
 "I see four tracks yet, Pete, so that one of them could not have been killed."
 "They are leadin' ther horse o' ther shootet man, cap'n."
 "Now we will strike ther edge o' the chap'ral afore half a mile, an' then the valley are before us."
 "Yas, and if I remember right, Pete, we can see for a couple of miles down it."
 "Fact, cap'n."
 They now pressed on in silence, the chaparral growing thinner and thinner, until they suddenly came out in an open space, and beheld a sloping valley spread out before them.
 "Thar is our game, cap'n."
 As Prairie Pete spoke he pointed half a mile away down the valley, where were visible a mounted party.
 There were three riders and one riderless horse, and one glance was sufficient to show Cecil Lorne that the maiden he sought was one of the three.
 Raising his glass to his eyes he said:
 "Pete, the one in the center is Miss Dale, and the men upon either side I do not know."
 "Let me see thet lookin'-glass o' yourn, cap'n."
 The captain handed the glass to the scout, showed him how to adjust it to his eyes, and waited for him to speak.
 "Yer kin see elegint in this, cap'n, for I knows them gerloots."
 "Well, Pete?"
 "They hes the gal tied in her saddle."
 "Tied?"
 "Yas, cap'n, they is afeerd o' her claws."
 "But who are they, Pete?"
 "Marauders."
 "What?"
 "I means it, cap'n, for they belongs ter ther Marauder band as I hes seen 'em afore."
 "But where is Juan?"
 "He must be back in ther grave, cap'n."
 "Come, Pete, we will pursue them and wrest her from their power."
 As Cecil Lorne spoke he was about to dash forward, when his rein was seized with giant force by the scout, and his horse thrown quickly back.
 "Held on, cap'n, fer thar is more o' 'em."
 "More?"
 "Does yer see thet gang o' horsemen comin' out o' thet thicket yonder?"
 "Yas, and they are advancing to meet the others."

"Fact! they is all Marauders."

"By Heaven! there is Dead Shot Dandy," cried Cecil Lorne, turning his glass upon the party of horsemen, a score in number, and at whose head rode the one to whom he referred as the outlawed scout.

Prairie Pete took the glass and looked attentively through it for a while.

Then he said slowly:

"Cap'n, yer is right, fer thet are Dead Shot sure, an' he are out fer work with his Marauders, as yonder is another batch of 'em."

"Let me count them," said Cecil Lorne, and running his eye over the three separate parties, he said:

"Twenty-one and twelve are thirty-three, and the two who have Miss Dale a prisoner make thirty-five in all."

"I will need my entire force, Pete, and I will return at once and lead the command on."

"We has time, cap'n, fer they will camp somewhar near here ter-night, an' I kin find out jist whar."

"Now let's go back an' see who are in thet grave, an' then I'll jist hang out here while you goes arter ther boys an' fetches 'em up, fer I is confidant them Marauders hes started in ter do some red work, an' we kin chase 'em clean ter the'r den ef we gits 'em ter goin' onst."

CHAPTER XVII.

THE SPY'S FATE.

WHEN Chaparral Juan dashed off, after the shot of Benito the Boy Bugler, he felt that he was flying for his life.

From whence the shot had come he did not stop to consider, though he knew that the man whom he had intended to kill did not fire it, and consequently had friends near by.

Keno Kit was a man he cared not to meet under such circumstances, and certainly not friends of his, so he made haste to get out of the way.

Mounting his horse he urged him to full speed, confidently expecting to be chased.

But as no pursuing boofs were heard, he drew down to a slower pace and began to examine his wounded hand.

He had been forced to drop his rifle, had been wounded severely, and had to fly, so he was in no pleasant humor.

Looking at his hand he saw that the bullet had shattered the thumb-bone near the socket at the wrist.

The wound was most painful, bled freely, and he felt that he would have to lose the thumb.

He dared not go back to the fort, for upon the return of Keno Kit and his friend—for Juan knew not who it was that had shot him—it would come out that he had been about to shoot the scout.

Then Keno Kit was no man to trifle with, he knew.

"I'll have ter make for the Marauder camp," he muttered.

Stopping at a small stream he bound his hand up as well as he could, and then started on a trail leading north through the chaparral.

He had not gone very far before he came to a sudden halt, for he beheld a rifle covering him.

"Hands up, pard!"

The order was promptly obeyed by Chaparral Juan, while a voice called out his name.

"Ah! it is you Brazos Bill!" said Chaparral Juan.

"Yas, pard, an' we didn't know yer at first: but which way was yer goin'?"

"To the Half-way Ground, Brazos Bill, to join the band, for I've been caught in some music, and will have to join you to save my neck."

"See, I am badly wounded."

"Yas, it are more than a scratch; but yer is fortinit, fer my pard here are a Mexican doctor thet used p'izen instead o' medicine, an' hed ter skip ter jine ther Marauders."

"Here, Pills, this pard o' mine are one o' our spies at Fort Blank, an' he are wounded," and Brazos Bill called out to a Mexican who stood near, and who was in fact the one who had brought Chaparral Juan to a halt by the prompt invitation to put his hands up.

"All right, let me see how you are wounded," said the Mexican doctor, who had according to Brazos Bill given poison instead of medicine to some unfortunate patient.

Chaparral Juan showed his wounded hand to Pills, as the Mexican was called, and watched him closely while he examined it.

"You must lose your thumb."

"I are glad it hain't ther whole grub grabber."

"I will dress it for you now, and fix it all right when I get to camp."

"Oh, Pills kin do it, Pard Juan, I sw'ar; but he hain't got his cuttin' instermints along with him, bein' as he jist come with me on a leetle scout."

"Hes ver any news ter tell?"

"The soldiers are ter move ag'in' yer in about four days."

"Waal, ther cap'n are back in ther valley now, an' ter morrer ther band comes down to jine him fer a raid, as he intends ter make it hot fer some o' ther ranches."

"And you is scoutin' in advance?"

"Yas, Pills an' me; but we'll jine ther cap'n ter morrer an' tell him ef thar is any scouts an' sojers prowlin' round."

After a few more words the trio went further into the chaparral and encamped for the night.

But Chaparral Juan passed a night of suffering, and was glad to see the dawn break.

Remaining in camp, while Brazos Bill and the Mexican doctor went on a scout, he paced to and fro in agony, bitterly cursing his luck.

At last he mounted his horse, determined to look them up and tell the doctor that he must do something to ease his pain, when suddenly he came upon a personage who, in his intense suffering, he had not noticed, and who, beholding him, had him covered.

"Hold! are you not a scout from Fort Blank?"

"I am, what are left of me," and he gazed upon the one who put the question in deep surprise.

"So I thought; but do you know me?"

"Yas, if you is in pants; I know you to be the daughter of Bronze Bill, and you have been at the fort wounded for some time past."

"Yas, I am Lulu Dale; but are you wounded?"

"I am, for I got into a fight with some Marauders a while ago, and they shot me."

"One of them lies wounded back here, and if you will go with me you may be able to make him tell where their den is; but I was suffering too much to bother with him."

"I'll go with you, for I wish to find the Marauders' camp," answered Lulu, quickly, and she followed the Mexican, little suspecting treachery from one whom she had seen at the fort, and knew to be one of the fort scouts.

But Chaparral Juan had made up his mind that Lulu Dale would be a prize worth having.

He could not understand why she had resumed male attire and left the fort; but he knew that it was said she had sworn to avenge her father's death, and rightly supposed that she had started out for that purpose.

He also had heard it floating about the camp that the young girl carried her money and some valuable jewels about her person, and this was the temptation to him, which made him forget momentarily his pain.

He did not care to share his prize with others, so determined to gain the confidence of the maiden and then suddenly force her to give up her riches by covering her with his revolver and threatening her with death if she refused.

Riding along by her side for a while, he suddenly drew his revolver and leveled it full at her, while he said:

"Senorita, I need your money and your jewels, so give all to me or I will kill you."

That Lulu was completely taken aback was certain; but she was not alarmed, and, discovering who she had to deal with, she determined to play a deep part, which had served her well on a former occasion.

"Ah, senor, you would not rob a poor defenseless girl?" she pleaded, clasping her hands in seeming distress.

"Yas, I'll rob you, and if you do not give up your money, I will kill you," was the stern reply.

"But, senor—"

"Come, senorita, I am suffering too much to parley, and your money will be balm to my wound, so out with it."

She buried her face in her hands and pretended to weep, and then put her hand down upon a saddle pocket, while she said:

"You won't take all, will you, senor?"

"Yas, every peso."

"Not my jewels?"

"Yas; jewels, paper money and gold," was the savage reply.

"Won't lea' do as well?" came in ringing tones, and a revolver flashed with the words and Chaparral Juan uttered a cry as he fell dead from his horse.

But just at that instant there came a whirling sound through the air, and two lariats, skillfully thrown, settled down over her head and about the neck of her horse.

She was wholly taken by surprise, and powerless to resist, found herself a prisoner in the hands of Brazos Bill and his Mexican comrade, who had crept up to hear the spat, unseen by either Chaparral Juan or herself.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A CAPTIVE.

HAD Lulu been able to use her revolver she would soon have freed herself from captivity.

But the lariat that had fallen about her had knocked the weapon, which had just proved so fatal to Chaparral Juan, from her hand and her arms were pinioned down so that she could not draw a second revolver.

Instantly the Mexican sprang to her bridle-rein, while Brazos Bill bounded to her side, and said:

"Hold on, my fine feller, for yer is too valuable a prize ter let git away."

"Who are you?" she asked in angry tones.

"We is Marauders o' ther Rio Grande."

"Ah, you belong to that cut-throat band, do you?" was the cool response.

"We does."

"I am glad to hear it, for you will take me to your chief."

The two men were nonplused, for they had expected the chief to be the last personage their prisoner wished to see.

"Yas, we'll take you to him," said Brazos Bill, while Pills asked:

"Who are you, senor?"

Lulu's face flushed, for she saw they took her for a boy, and she determined to keep them in ignorance of who she really was, so she said:

"Have you ever heard of the Boy Bugler of Fort Blank?"

"A few, we has, an' he are a goer."

"So you is that young game-cock, is yer?" said Brazos Bill.

Lulu nodded, and the Mexican said:

"Then you'll find a surprise awaiting you at the stronghold."

"What is it?"

"Wait and see," was the laconic response of Pills.

"Waal, Pills, a blind man kin see thet we hes ter look sharp arter this youngster, fer he hev give poor Juan thar ther call fer t'other land."

"You called that man by his name?" said Lulu.

"Yas."

"You knew him then?"

"Yas, he were one o' our spies at ther fort, an' I don't mind tellin' yer, as yer'll never git back ter do us harm."

"I am glad that I killed him then, as he was a traitor to the service in which he was enlisted," warmly said Lulu.

"No, he were true ter the Marauders, an' a spy in the army service."

"We left him in camp awhile ago, an' he hed better stayed thar fer his own good, tho' it air better fer us thet he did not, as we hes tuk' you in."

"And you intend to take me to your chief?"

"Yas."

"Captain Dead Shot is his name?"

"Thet air it."

"Well, I am ready."

"Yer seems durned anxious ter go."

"I am."

"Yer'll be more anxious ter git back."

Lulu smiled, and then the two men bound her to her horse, and hitched him to a tree, while Brazos Bill said:

"Pills, we hes got ter plant Chaparral Juan, fer it won't do ter let the wolves pick his bones."

"I am willing," was the answer, and the two men set to work with their long knives to dig a grave.

Then they searched the dead man for any valuables he might have about him, and taking his belt of arms, they bundled him into the rude hole which they had dug for him, while Lulu gazed on in silence.

"Now, young pard, we will make fer ther chief, an' I guess it won't be so durned long afore yer sees him."

So saying, the outlaws mounted their horses, and with Lulu riding between them, and leading the animal that had belonged to Chaparral Juan, they set off on their way, little knowing that two dangerous foes were not far behind them.

Who those foes were the reader knows already, and that they soon after spied the Marauders and their captive, with others of the band in the valley.

And, while Lulu was led a captive to the Marauder Chief, Captain Cecil Lorne, seeing that he and Prairie Pete dared not attempt a

rescue of her unaided, returned to the grave in the chaparral.

It did not take them long to throw out the loose dirt, and both together uttered the names:

"Chaparral Juan!"

"Yas, an' he hev got a bullit wound square in ther forehead," said Prairie Pete.

"Yas, an' he was doubtless killed in attempting to rescue Miss Dale," responded Cecil Lorne, little dreaming of the treachery of the scout.

"He mou't hev been, an' then ag'in maybe not—principally maybe not, Pard Cap'n, fer Chaparral Juan were not o' thet kind ter aid anybody but hisself," said Prairie Pete, who knew his fellow scout well.

"I fear you wrong him, Pete; but we will fill up his grave, and then I will go on after the command, while you remain in the edge of the chaparral and see where the Marauders make their camp to night."

"I'll do it, cap'n, an' my idee are thet we kin give 'em a surprise-party thet will be great."

"I shall attack them, Pete, and keep a force in reserve to push the fugitives to their very den," said Cecil Lorne as he rode away, his mind made up to wipe out the Marauder band utterly before returning to the fort.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE MARAUDER CAPTAIN.

THE two captors of Lulu Dale were greatly surprised at the coolness of their prisoner, under the circumstances of being in the hands of Marauders.

They had expected him to show fear, for they still believed him to be a boy, and admired his pluck.

Seeing that they looked upon him as Benito the Boy Bugler, Lulu determined to keep up the idea, and rode along with them without the slightest sign of fear at what her fate might be.

Soon she saw ahead the party of horsemen that had attracted the attention of Cecil Lorne and Prairie Pete from the edge of the chaparral.

"Are those men Marauders?" she asked.

"Thet is what they calls 'em, Marauders o' ther Rio Grande," answered Brazos Bill.

"And that is your chief at their head?"

"It are."

"He is a fine-looking man."

"Yas he are, but maybe yer won't want ter compliment him so much when yer knows him better."

"Why?"

"Waal, he are ther devil done up in pants when he gits on ther rampage."

"Ah! he is a terror then?"

"He are."

"But he is a daring man and a good commander, or he could never have held the band together as he has, and eluded all pursuit."

"Thar yer head are level, Boy Boogler, fer he are a screamer."

"Where is your camp?"

"Waal, now, I fergits."

"Oh, you do."

"I does."

"You mean that you will not tell me?"

"Ask Pills that."

"Pills, where is your camp?" asked Lulu with the perfect air of an independent boy.

"Which camp?"

"The one which you make your retreat."

"You'll find it out soon enough, boy, and know more of it than you care to before long," was the significant reply.

Lulu laughed lightly, and then her eyes fell upon the second party of men, and she asked:

"Are those Marauders, too?"

"They be."

"Let me see, there are thirty-five of you in all," she said, having quickly counted them.

"Thar is more whar they comed from."

"Indeed?"

"Yas, as you will diskiver."

"Well, there are but thirty-five of you now here, and if Captain Lorne was only near with as many of his troopers, then you'd find how quickly the Marauders of the Rio Grande would be wiped out."

"Not much, fer them thirty-five yer see, ef I does include Pills and me, is thirty-five men clean through, an' kin lay out any fifty troopers as ever tackled us."

"Why, boy, they wouldn't be a show fer us."

Lulu smiled doubtfully, and now kept her eyes upon the chief, who was approaching with his men, the two parties having joined forces.

He was mounted upon a superb black horse, equipped with Mexican saddle, bridle and trappings, and his attire was elegant and most becoming, for he wore the costume of Mexico.

He came forward with the air of a man who

knew his power, and his handsome face, no one would have ever believed, without proof, hid the heart of a merciless outlaw.

"Well, Brazos Bill, who have you there?" he asked, as he halted before the two men and their prisoner.

"Yer hes heerd o' ther Boy Boogler, cap'n!"

"Yes."

"This are him."

"Hal are you the daring youth known as Benito, the Boy Bugler?" and the outlaw chief fixed his eyes upon the face of the girl.

"Your cut-throat hireling told you that I was Benito, the Boy Bugler," answered Lulu evasively, with a look of utter scorn upon her beautiful face.

"I am glad to know you, my young friend, and several times, when near the fort, I have enjoyed your playing immensely."

"You are a skilled musician, for one so young," and the chief spoke in a voice that was very rich in tone, and winning.

"And you are very young to be the skillful cut-throat you are," said Lulu promptly.

"Ah! you hit back, I see; but I guess we will soon become good friends, for I need a bugler for my band."

"Where did you capture the Senor Benito, Brazos Bill?"

"Waal, cap'n, it were not done squar', fer we tuk him onawares."

"Ef we hedn't, Pills or myself w'u'd hev hed our toes tained up ter ther daisies now, I reckon."

"Yer see, we meeted Chap'ral Juan—"

"Hal my spy!"

"Yas, cap'n."

"Where is he?"

"Dunno edzactly whar his speerit are, but guesses it are a-travelin' fer warmer climates; but his carkis do lay in a grave back in ther chap'rals."

"Ah! he is dead?"

"As dead as yer ever seen a man, cap'n."

"Quick! tell me of his death, and how you captured this youth."

"Waal, we meeted Juan yesterday, an' he were badly wounded in ther hand, an' a-comin' this way."

"Then he told us that Cap'n Lorne were fittin' up a party o' troops an' scouts ter strike our trail."

"This is news; but when does he start?"

"In about four days, Juan said."

"Good!"

"Waal, we camped with Chap'ral Juan, and left him groanin' over his suf'riu' while we went on a scout."

"When we were comin' back we seen Juan an' this here boy, an' I thinks ther spy was a-goin' ter rob him."

"We dismounted an' slipped up, lariats in hand, an' jist then Juan got it squar' in ther forehead from the boy, an' we slung ther ropes an' yanked in ther boogler an' his horse."

"The man I knew to be a scout, and trusted him; but I found him to be a spy and a robber, and when he attempted to rob me I killed him," put in Lulu.

"Well done for you, Senor Benito, if you did kill a good spy of mine," said Captain Dead Shot with a light laugh.

"We then comed on with ther boy, arter we hed planted Chap'ral Juan, an' here he are an' we too, cap'n."

"You have done well, Brazos, you and your comrade, and I'll not forget you."

"Now we will go into camp and get a good rest for ourselves and horses, for I intend to make a dash at the river ranches, strike a few, and then, when Lorne and his troopers are riding there to attack us, I shall rush upon the fort, which we can take by surprise, and gain plenty of booty."

"What do you think, Benito?" and the chief turned to Lulu with a smile.

The disguised maiden was surprised at this plan of the outlaw leader, to catch the fort off its guard, and determined to use every effort to escape to be able to warn Colonel Du Barry of his danger, and risk for the present her own desire for revenge.

But when addressed by Captain Dead Shot, she concealed her emotion and alarm, and said quietly:

"You know your plans best, sir, and what you can do."

The chief made no reply, but the response of the supposed boy annoyed him, for he feared there was something on foot that he could not understand.

At last they reached a thick clump of timber, upon the bank of a small stream, and went into camp, the chief taking Benito with him.

"Now, my boy, I will release you of your bonds, if you will pledge yourself not to attempt to escape."

"Otherwise I will keep you bound— Ah! how is it that you have had your ears pierced, as a boy does not wear ear-rings?" and the chief gazed fixedly into the face of the girl.

In spite of herself, Lulu turned crimson at the charge, and said simply:

"It was a whim of my father to have my ears pierced."

The chief looked at her attentively, and then said:

"Are you really the Boy Bugler of Fort Blank?"

Lulu had implied before that she was, yet had not said so, and now, when forced to speak, she would not tell a deliberate lie, so said frankly:

"I am not."

"I thought your face and form were far too beautiful for a boy."

"Who are you?"

Her eyes flashed fire as she said:

"Did you know the scout, Bronze Bill?"

"I did."

"I am his daughter."

"Ah! I killed him at Padre's Rock one afternoon," was the unexpected and startlingly cool reply.

Lulu was now as pale as death, while her voice quivered as she said:

"And, Captain Dead Shot, the Marauder, I came in this disguise to seek you and avenge my father's death."

"It is lucky that I did not release you of your bonds, my sweet girl, or you would have killed me indeed."

"Well, forewarned is forearmed, and I will see that you do no harm," and the chief turned away, leaving poor Lulu utterly crushed by her discovery and defeat in her purpose.

CHAPTER XX.

THE FLIGHT OF THE MARAUDERS.

THE outlaw chief seemed in a quandary regarding his fair captive.

Had she been, indeed, Benito, the Boy Bugler, he would have felt no compunction in regard to putting the boy in irons; but he did not wish to show fear of a young girl.

Approaching her, as she stood bound to a tree, he said, politely:

"I do not know what to do with you, miss."

"Set me free."

"No, I cannot do that."

"If your father had been a rich man, then your ransom would have paid me well."

"But I take it that you are a poor girl, for I carried to you at the Brent Hacienda all that your father left you, I remember."

"Yes, and I only wish I had then known that you had killed my poor father."

"I am glad that you did not."

"I robbed the paymaster, yet was not mean enough to rob you, so risked my life to give you the money."

"You have been, if I mistake not, laid up with a wound at Fort Blank?"

"You certainly should know that, Sir Outlaw."

"True, so my spies reported to me regarding you; but I have had no very late tidings regarding the movement at the fort, and little knew of this intended masquerade of yours in seeking revenge against me."

"But tell me, you know the Boy Bugler well?"

"I have met him at the fort."

"He lays at my door the massacre of his family, I believe?"

"He does, and justly."

"You are mistaken, for a small band of my men committed that act, and my share of the booty was a fair prisoner."

"A prisoner?" quickly asked Lulu, remembering that there was a mystery hanging over the fate of Louise Dewhurst, the sister of the Boy Bugler.

"Yes, the sister of this Benito escaped the massacre, but was found by me some days after wandering upon the prairies."

"I took her to my stronghold, learned to love her devotedly, and, had you been the Boy Bugler, I intended to bring her to terms through her brother."

"Bring her to terms?"

"Yes, for I love her, and she will not return that love."

"Still, through fear of what fate might befall her brother, she would consent to become my wife, and once she had done so, I frankly

confess to you that I would have given up my evil life and lived for her alone."

"And made her utterly wretched as the wife of an outlaw, and one who had forced her to become such," said Lulu with a sneer.

"No, I would have won her love by kindness and devotion to her."

"Not if she is a true woman and if she is like her brother, she has spirit and character enough to scorn you."

"You are severe."

"I am just."

"Well, we will discuss your case now."

"Well, sir, what about me?"

"Will you pledge yourself not to attempt to kill me, or to escape, if I will release you of your bonds?"

"I will not."

"Enough then, you must suffer as you are until I reach my stronghold."

"The men shall throw you up a shelter of brush, and make you as comfortable as possible for the night, and in the morning I will send you to the stronghold under charge of Brazos Bill, while I go upon a raid which I intend to make my master-stroke."

"Farewell until I meet you at the stronghold."

He turned away and Lulu was alone.

But Brazos Bill soon came with several of his comrades, and built a brush shanty for Lulu, whose bonds were then eased so that she could be more comfortable.

As the chief wished to give his men all the rest possible, and did not believe that a white or red-skin foe was near, he placed no guards and all retired to their blankets at an early hour.

By ten o'clock the camp was as silent as a graveyard.

But Lulu was restless, wretched and awake, and several times she started, as she thought she heard a sound at some distance off, not made by those in camp.

Presently there was a wild snorting of horses, and then a ringing command:

"Rush in upon them, men, and show no mercy!"

With wild yells from the scouts, and cheers from the soldiers, Cecil Lorne led his men right in upon the sleeping outlaws.

Taken by surprise as they were, the Marauders were yet too used to scenes of carnage to be wholly unnerved, and every man sprung to his feet with his revolvers in his hand.

But their eyes had just opened from sleep, the firelights blinded them, and half of the band fell at the very first onslaught.

At a glance Captain Dead Shot saw that it was useless to resist, and that flight alone would save him.

Calling to his men, however, to rally, he sprung for his horse, and led up Lulu's animal at the same time.

It was but an instant's work to throw the saddles upon them, and placing the maiden upon her horse he quickly bound her there, and then shouted out to his men who were standing at bay:

"To the Retreat Trail, boys!"

A dozen men sprung for their horses to follow him, but when the party dashed out of the thicket, the chief saw but six of his band had escaped death or capture.

"To the stronghold, men, and with a good start we can throw them off the scent at the river."

"Drive spurs and ride hard!" shouted the Marauder leader.

Like the very wind they swept along in their flight.

But soon after a dark mass shot out from the timber, and the outlaws knew that they were pursued.

As they sped along, the mass of horsemen that had started in pursuit began to spread out, according to the speed of their horses, and those in advance soon dwindled down to Captain Lorne, Lieutenant Lancaster, Prairie Pete and half a score of troopers and scouts.

Sparing not their horses the Marauders threw the miles behind them, and soon the river was reached.

Into the shallow stream they dashed, but they never crossed to the other side.

This both Cecil Lorne and Prairie Pete discovered, and saw them turn up the stream, and the secret of the many mysterious disappearances of the Marauders was out, and why their stronghold could not be found.

When his men came up, Captain Lorne followed into and up the stream, and after stemming the current for a mile, they came to where high rocky banks were upon either side.

But the moon was now riding high in the

heavens, and Prairie Pete, hugging the shore, saw where the Marauders had left the water, and on the troopers dashed upon their trail once more.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE MYSTERY SOLVED.

ONCE more upon the land the troopers went rapidly on, Prairie Pete and Captain Cecil Lorne in advance.

The way led through a canyon, so that there was no possibility of losing the trail as long as they had those walls of rock upon either side.

But presently Prairie Pete halted, and said: "Cap'n, yonder hill must overhang their den of the Marauders."

"Then push on, Pete, for we are twenty and they have not half that force now."

"I guesses they has more men in camp."

"It matters not; we must attack them."

"You knows best, so on we goes, cap'n."

Again the horsemen dashed along the canyon to suddenly come out into an open space, several acres in size, and overhung at the furthest end by a lofty hill with precipitous sides.

A glimmer of light was visible, and a man was discovered at the base of the hill trying to put the fire out.

But just then there came to the ears of the troopers a command of—

"Fire!"

Of course the troopers supposed that the volley was to be at them.

But as the discharge of revolvers lit up the scene they descried the outlaws dropping from their horses, and then came the wild ringing notes of a bugle.

"The Boy Bugler!" shouted Cecil Lorne, and then came his stirring command:

"Charge!"

With a cheer his men dashed forward, and revolvers in one hand, sabers in the other, darted to the base of the hill.

"Halt! Bravo for Captain Lorne!" shouted a voice that all recognized, while the captain cried:

"Benito, my brave boy, are you here?"

"Yes, captain, I am here with a few friends," answered the youth.

"And the outlaws?"

"Dead or prisoners."

"And Dead Shot Dandy?"

"Am here to speak for myself, Captain Lorne," and the outlawed scout stepped forward in the moonlight.

"Then, sir, you are my prisoner."

"Pardon me, Captain Lorne, I am no such thing," was the cool reply.

"Hal! do you defy me, Dead Shot?"

"Oh, no, sir; but I think this is the man you want."

"Lead him forward, Keno Kit!"

With Benito upon one side of him and Keno Kit upon the other, a man advanced from the shadow of the hillside and stood before Captain Lorne, and by the side of Dead Shot Dandy.

"Great God! he is your very self, Decatur," cried the officer.

"He is my counterpart, sir, and the one who has caused me to be outlawed, and so nearly lost me my life."

"Who is he?"

"His name is Norton Allen, sir, and we were schoolmates together, then college students, and always rivals."

"Then he is not your twin brother?"

"No, sir, we are, I am happy to say, no relation to each other, though we are so much alike it is hard to tell us apart."

"I came to Texas and Mexico, because my father married again, and my home was an unhappy one."

"I took to scouting because I liked the wild life."

"This man, Norton Allen, I heard had gone to the bad, and yet I knew not that he was Captain Alvarez, who now calls himself Captain Dead Shot, the Marauder."

"He knew that I was at the fort, and he it is that has played the part of robber and murderer, for which I have gotten the name."

"I came on his trail, and had discovered his secret haunt here, and was going to the fort to tell you, when I met Keno Kit and Benito."

"Then we came on together to find that this man and his band had gone off on a raid, and but four men in charge."

"Three of these men we killed, the fourth we spared upon conditions, and he confessed all."

"This is remarkable, Decatur."

"Yes, captain, but I have more to tell you."

"This man confessed that Captain Alvarez

killed Bronze Bill, robbed the paymaster, and had as spies in the fort, Monte—"

"Monte?" cried the captain in surprise.

"Yes, sir, Monte and Chaparral Juan."

"The former was killed in the timber by the fire of the outlaws, and Chaparral Juan lies in a grave back in the chaparrals."

"Slain by the girl," said the Marauder Chief, pointing to Lulu, whom Benito had freed of her bonds.

In a word Lulu told her story, and then Duke Decatur, the man who had been outlawed by the crimes of another, said:

"But, Captain Lorne, the good news is yet to tell, for we found here as a captive, Miss Louise Dewhurst, the sister of our gallant Boy Bugler." Words cannot portray the effect of these glad tidings upon the men, for they shouted like mad, and the maiden received a warm welcome from Captain Lorne and Lieutenant Lancaster.

"We intended," explained Dead Shot Dandy, "to start in the morning for the fort, but heard the outlaws coming, and prepared to meet them, for we knew that they must be pursued."

"Now, Captain Lorne, I report to you for duty, sir."

"And back to your rank as chief of scouts you go, Decatur, for the colonel will be most delighted to welcome you once more."

"But one thing!"

"Yes, sir."

"How about those two men whom you killed in the timber, and upon whom you found the money and jewels you gave to Benito?"

"It was Captain Alvarez, sir, and two of his men."

"He half-way suspected Monte and tried to kill him by a long shot into his cabin."

"I killed the two men with him, while he was some distance off, and when I went on to the fort, he carried their bodies off upon their horses."

"Then the whole mystery is solved, and I turn over to you, for safe keeping, until he is hanged, your counterpart."

"He shall not escape me, sir," answered Dead Shot Dandy, quietly.

CHAPTER XXII.

AMONG THE MISSING.

WEARIED out the gallant troopers and all sought rest, the prisoners having been securely bound beyond all possibility of escape it was believed.

Duke Decatur, having had Captain Dead Shot turned over to him for safe keeping took measures to have him on hand when wanted, and the daring outlaw leader was given a place on a blanket between him and the Boy Bugler.

In a short while all was quiet in the camp, and it was evident that Duke Decatur and Benito were fast asleep, though the prisoner moved about uneasily at times; but this seemed but natural to a man who knew that the end of his life was at hand, and that he must die on the gallows.

Suddenly the arm of the Marauder Chief went gently over the form of Duke Decatur and it was certain that it was no longer held by thongs.

Then it seemed as though the hand held something.

For a moment it rested there and was then withdrawn, while the same movement was repeated over the form of the Boy Bugler.

After a moment or so held in that position, the arm was drawn back, and the Marauder leader arose to a sitting posture.

Glancing about the camp an instant, he then began very quietly to draw off the outer attire of Dead Shot Dandy.

This he put on, and taking the scout's hat and arms he arose and walked across the camp to the place where Louise Dewhurst slept.

Bending over her, he remained for awhile in that position, and then rising, held her in his arms.

With bold tread he walked through the silent, sleeping camp to where the horses were, and laying the form, limp and motionless, down upon the ground, he very coolly set to work to place his own and a lady's saddle upon two of the best animals of the lot among those that had been captured from his stronghold.

The poor girl seemed to be either unconscious or dead, and he raised her again in his arms, and mounted, riding out of the corral, and leading one horse.

Then his quick eye detected a sentinel not far off on duty, and knowing that he could not pass him unnoticed, he replaced the maiden upon the ground, and walked straight up to the soldier,

who halted him when he saw him approach, with:

"Halt! who comes there?"

"I am Dead Shot, the scout, my man, and I came to tell you that I was starting upon a scout with a pack-horse, so you will let me pass."

"All right, sir; but you are so like Captain Dead Shot, that I think I ought to call the corporal of the guard to see if you are really the Dead Shot Dandy," answered the soldier.

"I left him securely bound a few moments ago, and I think, cunning as he is, he would find it hard work to escape from this camp."

"It would be hard work, sir; but I think I should call the corporal, so as to be free from blame myself."

"Here, look at me close, and you will see that I am not clothed as Captain Dead Shot was when you captured him."

"See! I am Dead Shot Dandy."

He stepped close up to the soldier as he spoke, and in an instant his hand grasped the throat of the man with a strength that shut off all effort at outcry.

Then once, twice, the blade of a bowie-knife was driven deep into the broad breast of the poor soldier, who sunk with a moan to the earth.

Wiping the weapon upon the coat of the sentinel, the daring man returned to the still unconscious maiden, and placing her before him in the saddle, rode out of camp leading the other horse.

Unconscious of the tragedy enacted in their midst, the tired soldiers slept on until the relief-guard went on his rounds.

Then the dead soldier was discovered, an alarm was sounded and the camp was in an uproar.

But it was attributed to Indians, and no one at first believed that any one was missing from the camp, until it was found that two persons were very hard to arouse.

Those two were Dead Shot Dandy and the Boy Bugler, and when aroused, they seemed dazed and complained of dizziness.

It was then seen that Captain Dead Shot had escaped, and the camp was wild with excitement, which was added to when Lulu Dale came out of the wickup where she had been sleeping with Louise Dewhurst, and stated that her companion was missing.

She too complained of intense dizziness, and a small vial found near her bed told the story of Captain Dead Shot's escape, for upon it was labeled "Chloroform."

"He chloroformed you and Benito as he lay between you, Decatur, and then did the same for the ladies, and has taken poor Miss Dewhurst with him," said Captain Lorne.

"My poor, poor sister; what is to be done, Mr. Decatur?" and Benito turned to the scout, who quietly remarked:

"We can do nothing to-night in this darkness, Benito, and besides neither you or I are ourselves after that villain's work upon us; but with dawn we will strike his trail and follow it to the ends of the earth."

"And I will accompany you, Decatur, with half a score of my men."

"No, Captain Lorne, thank you, for Benito and myself can do better alone," was Dead Shot Dandy's reply, and there was something in his manner which meant woe for Captain Dead Shot.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE OUTLAW'S THREAT.

THE poor girl who had so long been a captive in the hands of the outlaw chief, and who had again fallen into his clutches, awoke to consciousness some time after leaving the camp.

All along the outlaw had held her tenderly in his arms, while he rode at a brisk walk over the prairie, for he seemed in no hurry to get away quickly from the vicinity of the soldiers, and when she at last rallied from the effects of the drug which had made her so helpless a victim, she did not at first realize where she was.

"Who are you? Where am I? Release me!"

"Oh! how my head swims!"

Such were the utterances that first came from her lips, and in response Captain Dead Shot said in his rich, musical voice:

"I am one who loves you, Louise, and you are with one who will preserve and protect you through life."

She did not at first catch the meaning of his words, for her brain yet reeled, and she was half dazed, but, with a great effort she shook off the feeling upon her and turned in the saddle to glance up into his face.

In the darkness she saw who it was, and fully realizing where she was, she attempted to spring from his embrace to the ground, while she uttered a cry of alarm.

But he had anticipated her act and held her firmly.

"Release me this instant, sir!" she said in a voice that quivered with emotion.

"No, I will not release you, except upon one condition," he said firmly.

"And what is that condition, sir?"

"You observe that I have a led horse?"

"Yes."

"He carries a lady's side-saddle."

"Well, sir?"

"I brought that horse for you."

"For me?"

"Yes, for I thought that you would prefer to ride alone than as you are."

"Oh! where am I?"

"With one who loves you, I said."

"You are the outlaw chief, Captain Dead Shot?"

"I am."

"And we are alone upon the prairie?"

"Yes, we are alone, with no one within call."

"But I went to sleep in the soldiers' camp, and with that sweet girl, Miss Dale, by my side."

"You did."

"And you were a prisoner, with that noble man, whom you have so wronged, from the accidental resemblance to you, as your guard."

"Yes."

"And my brother! oh, where is he?"

"Back in camp with the soldiers, that sweet girl, Miss Dale, and that noble man whom I accidentally resemble, and have so wronged."

"And I am here alone with you?"

"Yes, wholly in my power."

"No, no, this cannot be; it is some horrid dream, some nightmare from which I must awaken," and Louise covered her face with her hands.

"It is no dream, but reality, for I chloroformed the scout and escaped, and bending over you allowed you to inhale the odor, and thus I brought you with me."

"Oh, Heaven, have mercy!"

"Do not repine at your lot, Miss Dewhurst, for I have told you how dearly I love you, and I will be to you all that you could wish, friend, brother and husband."

With a startled cry she again tried to release herself from his grasp, but he held her as though she were in a vise of steel.

"Oh, release me from your hated hold," she cried.

"Upon one condition, as I before told you."

"I will accept any condition to be free."

"Promise me, upon your honor as a woman, that you will ride quietly along with me, and I will place you at once upon that horse."

"I gladly promise."

He halted and at once placed her in the saddle, but he held the reins of her horse in his own hand.

"Now, whither do you take me?"

"I will tell you frankly that I take you to the home of a Mexican padre who lives some leagues from here."

"And why there?"

"That he may make you my wife," was the low, earnest reply, and a groan broke from the lips of Louise Dewhurst at the thought of the fearful doom before her.

CHAPTER XXIV.

COWED BY CRIME.

A PADRE was riding slowly along a trail leading to a rather comfortable hacienda, when his eyes fell upon some one approaching across the plain before him.

He was mounted upon a diminutive donkey; such as many of the Mexican priests ride, and the hacienda was a league distant, so that should those coming toward him prove foes he had no opportunity to escape, and he well knew that Comanches had no compassion for the priesthood any more than for any one else.

Watching them closely, the padre was pleased to see that they were not Indians, and yet a frown came upon his face as he appeared to recognize one of the two persons, for he muttered:

"It is that Satan's imp, Captain Dead Shot."

For some moments the priest rode on in silence, and then he said, as the two drew nearer to him:

"He has a lady with him, and his manner seems dejected."

"What deviltry is he up to now, I wonder!"

"Well, I would give much to feel that I was well rid of him."

A few moments after the two trails came together, and Captain Dead Shot called out:

"Ho, Padre Francisco, I crave your blessing and the hospitality of your hacienda for this lady and myself."

"Well, my son, I give you the blessing and offer you my hospitality, for never can I turn any one from my door; but who is the senorita?" and he gazed with admiration upon the sad and beautiful face of Louise Dewhurst.

"It is the Senorita Dewhurst, Padre Francisco, a lady whom I expect to make my happy wife, and I am come for you to tie for us the matrimonial knot."

"You seem unhappy, senorita," said the padre not unkindly.

"I am, sir, oh, so very, very unhappy," cried Louise.

"You should not, as an expectant bride, be unhappy."

"Alas, sir, I cannot be otherwise."

"Come, padre, do not give the lady the blues talking to her about unhappiness, but spur up that lazy brute you ride and let us hasten on to get some of your good-cheer."

The padre obeyed, and soon after they drew rein at the hacienda gates, which were thrown open to them.

"You certainly live on the fat of the land, padre, and in the lap of luxury, for one who is a priest," rudely said Captain Dead Shot, glancing around the comfortable home.

The padre made no reply, but called to his housekeeper to conduct Louise to a room, and then he led the way to his own sanctum, and motioned to Captain Dead Shot to take a seat near him.

The outlaw threw himself into a comfortable chair, and said:

"Well, Francisco, there is something upon your mind, so out with it."

"There is, sir, and it is just this; I am tired of being under your base power as I am, and I shall throw off the yoke yet, cost what it may, if you do not cease coming to my house as you do."

"My dear Frank," answered Captain Dead Shot in a sneering tone, "you will do nothing of the kind, for my little visits to you do not hurt you, and, besides, this is to be my last one."

"Thank God for that."

"I tell you, Frank, I have come for you to marry me to that sweet girl."

"I will not do so."

"You will."

"I will not."

"I love her."

"She hates you."

"How do you know?"

"I see it in her face."

"Still she has promised to marry me."

"I believe that you lie, sir."

"Call your housekeeper."

"Why?"

"Do as I say."

The padre obeyed and the woman entered.

"Well, sir?" asked the priest.

"Bid your housekeeper seek the room of the lady who accompanied me here, and ask her if she has not consented to be my wife."

"Go, Anna, and obey the senor's request."

At the words of the padre the woman left the room, and after an absence of some minutes she returned.

"Well, Anna?"

"The senorita was weeping bitterly, senor, but she says that she has consented to become your wife."

Captain Dead Shot laughed lightly, while the padre frowned and said:

"That will do, Anna."

"Are you satisfied, Frank?"

"Yes, as to the consent; but you have forced that consent from her."

"Certainly I have; but I love her."

"You see she was found by me half-dead upon the prairie, the only survivor of a train that was massacred by the Indians."

"I carried her to my den and I learned to love her."

"But that accursed Dead Shot that I have tried to ruin, attacked my stronghold and I was captured; but I escaped from the camp and brought with me this girl."

"I rode to the wigwam of an Indian half-breed and got him to take our horses on into the hills, so that our pursuers would follow their trail, while I took from the red-skin two of his ponies and came on here, thus throwing Dead Shot and the others who pursue me off the track."

"The girl does not love me, I admit; but I love her and will have her, and, by Heaven, I will teach her to idolize me, for I will lead a different life."

"Why does she consent to marry you?"

"Because I swore to her if she did not I would hunt her brother down and kill him."

"He is known as Benito, the Boy Bugler, of Fort Blank."

"Yes, I have heard of him."

"Now I ask you to make Louise Dewhurst my wife, and I will then leave this country with her and live in foreign lands, for you know that I have invested my money—"

"Which you stole."

"True, and murdered to steal; but it is gold and I love it, and I have enough to make me a rich man."

"Well, I will not marry the girl to you."

"Oh, yes, you will."

"I will not."

"Look here, Frank, don't be a fool, for I have not forgotten that I recognized one day, as a Mexican padre, a young man I knew years ago who had run away to save his neck from the gallows."

The priest turned deadly pale, and said in a voice hoarse with emotion:

"Yes, years ago, in a fit of passion, I did take the life of a companion."

"I fled to save my life, and I came to Mexico, repented, turned my thoughts to better things, and giving up the world, became a priest."

"You recognized me, and oh! how you have tortured me since that fatal recognition!"

"Well, I will torture you more if you refuse my request."

"Answer me one question."

"Well?"

"You will never let me see your hated face again if I perform this ceremony—yes, commit the crime of marrying you?"

"I pledge you my word I will leave the country."

"Then I will commit the heinous crime of sacrificing that poor beautiful girl by making her your wife."

"You are wise, and to-morrow I will hold you to your word," was the triumphant response of Captain Dead Shot.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE YOUNG PADRE.

PADRE FRANCISCO sat alone in his cosy study brooding over his past.

Presently a servant entered and handed him a piece of paper, saying as he did so:

"This was given to Lopez at the gate, padre, by a senor."

The priest read half-aloud, as he glanced at the paper:

"I crave a secret audience with Padre Francisco, and it is important that I be not seen by his guests."

"This is strange; but bid him enter."

The servant soon returned, and a few moments after a person entered the room, and the priest said angrily:

"Senor, I believed that you had retired, and now I find you entering the privacy of my room at this late hour."

"Pardon, Senor Padre, but you doubtless take me for the outlaw chief, Captain Dead Shot, who is at present your guest."

"And you certainly are."

"I am not, Senor Padre; but on the contrary my name is Duke Decatur, or Dead Shot Dandy, as my comrades call me at the fort, and I have—but you are ill."

"Duke Decatur! Yes, you are none other," gasped the priest.

"And you are Frank Forman, who—"

"Yes, I am he who was Frank Forman, and who fled to escape the gallows to which I was sentenced for a crime I committed."

"But I have come here, I repented, and am now a priest."

"Thank God for it, Frank, for so I must call you."

"I have often thought of you, and I always liked you, and felt that liquor drove you to that act; but feel no dread, for your secret is safe with me."

"I feel it, I know it, Duke; but with that man—he who so strangely resembles you—I know it is not—and only this night he has forced me to consent to marry him to a poor—"

"Frank, I am on that man's trail."

"Do you know him as he is?"

"Alas, yes."

"He was my prisoner, but he escaped, and killed a soldier in doing so."

"He brought off with him a young girl whose

brother is with me, and we trailed him to a spot where he deserted his horses for others, to throw us off his trail.

"But I am too old a trailer to be deceived, and I tracked him here, and I will this night take him."

"He is a desperate man."

"I know that he is."

"He has forced the maiden to consent to marry him, and I promised to perform the ceremony."

"Good! now hear my plan."

"You write him a note, stating that a young priest brought you a message to go away on important business that would detain you for several days, and that he, the young padre, would marry him instead."

"I will cut off my hair and mustache, rig up in priestly garb, and when they appear before me to be married I will cover the chief with my revolver, and if he moves I will shoot him dead."

"I hope that he will move, bad as it seems for me to say so."

"We shall see," and then the two old companions talked over their plan and the past for hours, Benito being sent for and let into the secret.

With the morning Captain Dead Shot received the padre's note; but he did not care who married him, so that the ceremony was performed and told the servant to say to the Senor Padre, that he would be in the chapel with the senorita soon after breakfast.

Promptly he came, with poor Louise looking white as a corpse and quivering with emotion.

The supposed young padre stepped out before them and advancing close up to the man said quickly:

"Captain Dead Shot, you are my prisoner!"

A yell broke from the enraged outlaw, who saw himself entrapped, and he sprang toward Duke Decatur, at the same time drawing his revolver.

But the crack of a pistol resounded through the chapel, and Captain Dead Shot fell dead at the feet of Louise Dewhurst, who tottered forward and was caught in her brother's arms.

CHAPTER XXVI. CONCLUSION.

It would be impossible to describe the scenes that took place in Fort Blank, kind reader, when Duke Decatur returned with the tidings he had to tell.

Duke Decatur was at once reinstated as chief of scouts, while Colonel Du Barry adopted both Lulu Dale and Louise Dewhurst as his daughters, and a trio of beautiful daughters he then had.

But he did not claim them long, as Marie was given to Duke Decatur, Louise Dewhurst became engaged to Lieutenant Lancaster, and Lulu Dale promised to become the wife of the gallant Captain Cecil Lorne.

As for the Marauders, they were promptly shot without trial, and the soldiers said they "died game."

Benito, the Boy Bugler, received his commission as a lieutenant, and is now a distinguished officer in the army.

Duke Decatur, the Dead Shot Dandy, being possessed of wealth, resigned his rank as chief of scouts, and went to his plantation on the Mississippi, to dwell with his lovely wife, while Keno Kit stepped into his shoes as leader of the Buckskin Trailers, and Prairie Pete was made second in command.

Captain Lorne is now an officer of high rank, and Lulu, his lovely wife, accompanies him to all the border posts where he is ordered, while Lieutenant Lancaster, and Louise, once the Marauder's captive, live in New York, for the young bride insisted upon the resignation of her husband from the army, having had enough of wild life on the Rio Grande.

THE END.

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